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DISCOURSES

ON

VARIOUS TOPICS

RELATING TO

DOCTRINE AND PRACTICE.

BY THE LATE REVEREND

T. Timothy KENRICK.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOLUME II.

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SERMON XXI.

ON PUBLIC WORSHIP *.

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Praise ye the Lord, I will praise the Lord with my whole Heart, in the Assembly of the Upright and in the Congregation.

THAT the tribes of Israel assembled together for the worship of Jehovah no one can reasonably doubt, who reads with attention the language of their moral and devotional writings, or adverts to the facts recorded in their history. From these writings it is easy to adduce many passages, were it necessary, beside that which I have read, in which the writer calls upon others, and professes his own resolution, to praise the Lord in the assembly of the upright, *i. e.* in the assembly of believers in the true God, who are called *upright*, in opposition to the heathens, who were denominated *sinners*. It is well known, that before the erection of the temple a tabernacle or great tent was pitched, to which the twelve tribes resorted three times a year to offer the sacrifices which their law required, and to give thanks. For the better performance of these ser-

* Preached at Wrexham on the last Sunday but one before the author's death.

vices we also find, that a distinct order of men was instituted, called priests, who were to be assisted by another class of persons of inferiour rank, denominated Levites. When the superstructure above mentioned had been completed, it was consecrated to the service of religion by the Jewish monarch by solemn prayer, uttered in the presence, in the name, and with the concurrence, of the whole congregation of Israel. In consequence of the use made of it in succeeding times it was styled "the house of prayer for all nations." Nor was the temple the only place of public devotion. Synagogues were erected in every part of the land, where Moses was read every sabbath day, and where the reading of the law was accompanied by prayers.

A custom sanctioned by so high authority, of so venerable antiquity, as well as of such utility, could not fail to recommend itself to Christians, who embraced a religion differing in some degree from the religion of their ancestors, yet bearing a resemblance to it in many points, having the same object and embracing the same fundamental articles of faith. Accordingly, the earliest records of the New Testament and of heathen authors, which speak of Christians, describe them as assembling together for public worship, a practice which has continued, although under different forms, to the present day.

A few solitary individuals may perhaps be found, who have openly disputed the propriety of assembling together to worship the divine Being. Doubts

may have been entertained by others respecting the existence of such an obligation, and by many more respecting it's extent. It is not my present purpose, however, to address myself in particular to the one class of persons or the other. I mean to state only in a few words the arguments, which may be adduced in favour of public addresses to the divine Being, with a view to obviate one or two objections to the nature of that worship, or to the frequency of our attendance on it. I assume no ground, however, be it observed, but the humble ground of utility, which I think best adapted to my present purpose, easy as it would be to take a higher position; and treat of nothing which does not come under the denomination of public worship strictly so called, without including public instruction.

Are we doing wrong, then, my brethren, in assembling in this place to worship the God of our fathers? Is the practice not only unauthorized, but unnecessary? So some would persuade us to think. But no one can entertain this opinion, who seriously considers the nature of devotion in connection with the temper and urgent wants of mankind.

A devout temper is manifested, when we meditate with pleasure and admiration upon those sublime subjects, which are presented to the view of the mind by the existence, the attributes, the works, and administration of the supreme Being. Prayer consists in putting our ideas and feelings into words, and in presenting them as addresses to him. The

benefit felt to arise from such a practice is found to proceed from this circumstance, that, when the ideas and feelings of the mind are expressed in words and clothed in language, they acquire a strength, a vigour, a lustre, which they seldom possess, while the subject of silent contemplation in the breast. Faith thus assisted rises into assurance; gratitude becomes more ardent, benevolence more glowing, resignation more complete, contrition more poignant and genuine. Views and feelings, of the existence of which men were before scarcely conscious, now acquire a colour, a shape, and life, which leave no room to doubt of their reality or their power; and those ideas, which were somewhat more clearly perceived, become much more forcible and impressive. Such is the natural effect and benefit of prayer, when the act of an individual and performed in private.

Yet it cannot be denied, that persons may be found, whose minds are scarcely equal to such an effort, whose scanty stores will not furnish a suitable supply of devotional sentiments, who, when they attempt to look upwards toward an invisible being, behold nothing but a painful blank and void; or, if for a moment this most venerable of beings be presented to their apprehensions in the fulness of almighty power and perfect excellence, their thoughts are soon diverted to some other object, the affections grow languid, the language becomes unconnected, and, in a word, when they flattered themselves that

they were ascending to Heaven, they still find that they are chained to the earth. Such is the inaptitude of a great proportion of mankind for the services of private devotion, arising from defective information, or the want of early habit and custom.

To the languid piety of men of this character public worship is of the highest importance, offering precisely that kind of aid, which their situation requires. For, first, they are hereby furnished with those correct and animating representations of the character of the deity, of the wants and obligations of his creatures, of the faith and hope of a Christian, which their own minds would not supply, but which are necessary to the existence and strength of the devotional feelings. Some things they learn, which never occur to themselves; with many more they are brought acquainted in that form and dress, which renders them most striking and attractive, calculated to awaken the best affections of the heart, and to animate to useful exertion. To them, therefore, this worship is most desirable, either as the means of supplying an essential defect in their conceptions, or for doing justice to sentiments, which, however well conceived, cannot be well expressed, and wanting this aid lose much of their efficacy and effect.

To hear the deity addressed as the parent of the human race, who has given life and intelligence to incalculable multitudes, bestowed upon them numerous sources of present pleasure, and the means of

perpetual and boundless improvement; to hear him further represented as the beneficent power, which supports in being and continues to man his various capacities for enjoyment, cannot fail to impress upon the mind a sense of it's dependent situation, to awaken the delightful sensations of gratitude for past favours, and to encourage a cheerful expectation of future blessings.

In a world exposed to so many changes and sufferings, will it afford no consolation to the bleeding heart to learn, that the author and disposer of our destiny is possessed of infinite power, unerring wisdom, and infinite goodness? In the presence of such a being will not all fear and anxiety vanish from the breast, and hopes the most sublime and animating rise into certainty? To have presented to the mind the character of a perfect being, moral purity without a stain, benevolence without a shade of malignity, unbounded and infinite, must fill the mind with admiration, and produce no faint wishes to resemble so excellent a model. With such a standard before us, we can be at no loss to determine what actions or dispositions are base or virtuous, honourable or degrading. And whatever consolations we may derive from the consideration of mercy, which is an inseparable ingredient in the divine character, offences committed against so much goodness and excellence cannot fail to appear highly aggravated and criminal. On the contrary, moral worth, justice, fidelity, benevolence, acquire double value,

and interest the affections in the highest degree, when considered not only as the image and resemblance of the deity, but likewise as the means of obtaining the favour of the creator and governor of the universe.

Such is the favourable impression, which the language of devotion is calculated to make upon the unenlightened and uninformed mind. But the beneficial effect of social worship arises not merely from the language in which it is expressed: it derives much of it's utility and efficacy from society. It is a fact well known, and for which the philosopher finds himself in no difficulty to account, that all our feelings are heightened and animated by the presence of our fellow men, more especially when those men are of the number of our associates and friends. Born in the midst of society, and having from our earliest years a perpetual intercourse with human beings, the pleasures we derive from this intercourse leave numerous vestiges of themselves, and are revived and rendered active by the presence of the same or of other persons. To this cause must we attribute the peculiar lustre and vigour of the pleasures we receive in company, and to the same cause must we attribute the disposition which mankind have always shown for assembling together in multitudes.

While men meet together for convivial, for political, for commercial purposes, with the design of strengthening particular sentiments and feelings,

with which they wish to impress themselves or one another, let not religion disdain the aid of the same advantage for attaining a far nobler end, the growth and perfection of moral character. Faint and languid are in general the best feelings of devotion, when solitary and confined to a single breast; but they rise to an honourable fervour, when they receive the accumulated impression of numbers. The best informed and most enlightened minds may here receive benefit, and the sincerity of that man or his knowledge of himself is strongly to be suspected, who pronounces his character to be so perfect as not to need the assistance of public worship; to persons of ordinary virtue it's services are indispensable.

Let all men, therefore, assemble together, to offer up at the throne of infinite perfection the tribute of their common praises for common benefits, to express their sense of common wants, of common duties, and of common hopes, and at the same time to indulge their sorrow for common sins. On this subject there may be a perfect coincidence of sentiments and feelings. What is expressed by one will suit the case of all, and will be felt with double force when known to be a common sentiment.

The duty, then, which every man owes to himself, requires, that he should unite with his fellow Christians in the services of public worship; and what experience teaches him to be useful to himself, Christian benevolence calls upon him to counte-

nance for the benefit of others. Do you wish for the society of your friends to give that animation and energy to your devout feelings, which the dignity and grandeur of the object require, and which are necessary to render your devotion useful? Deny not to them the same advantage by withdrawing from the house of prayer; nor think so lightly of yourself as to imagine, that your presence adds nothing to the solemnity of public worship and the energy of devotion. Your duties and your claims are mutual.

It should never be forgotten how much stress our great master lays upon confessing him before men, that is, upon publicly declaring our faith in his religion, and what severe penalties he denounces against those, who from fear, shame, indolence, or some other unworthy motive, decline to make this profession. It is obvious, that to worship the God and father of Jesus Christ with our fellow Christians is of itself a clear compliance with this precept. It is a public avowal of our faith in the divine mission of Jesus of Nazareth, and of our resolution to submit to whatever duties or sacrifices his Gospel requires. But I see not how those, whose worship is confined to the closet, can be said to make this profession, or to do that service to the world, for which it has been enjoined. To them, therefore, must belong the guilt attached to the omission of so important a duty.

The immediate advantages to be derived from public

worship are such as have been mentioned, which, I presume, are sufficient to convince every reflecting and candid mind of it's utility, and to recommend it to his observance. But it is accompanied also with collateral advantages of no inconsiderable value, which must not on the present occasion be wholly overlooked.

As the social feelings lend their aid to devotion, so devotion in return increases the attachments, strengthens the ties, and enforces the duties of social life. The influence of both is alike powerful and beneficial. If the mind of man be animated with the joys of devotion, these joys will insensibly attach themselves to his fellow worshippers, and give them a share in his affections, which he could not otherwise have felt. Nor is it to be doubted, that of those who entertain the same sentiments, who appear to possess the same feelings as ourselves in regard to the most important objects of human attention, we form a more favourable opinion than of those, whose sentiments are unknown to us, or supposed to be erroneous. Let no one, however, suppose, that the tendency of this principle is to limit or confine our benevolence to a particular society or party. For, as in the plan of infinite wisdom the attachments which we are led to form for particular individuals in the intercourse of private life, in infancy and childhood, enable us to extend our regards to a wider circle as we advance in years; so the love of our fellow Christians in this or the other society pre-

pares the mind for admitting to it's embraces the wise and good of all persuasions throughout the world.

As the service of which I am speaking is public, like every thing of this nature it cannot fail to draw attention and excite inquiry; and men, who may not at first be convinced of the propriety of attending themselves, when they see others engaging with serious attention from time to time in a public service, will naturally desire to know the motives of such a conduct, the grounds and reasons for believing in the existence and attributes of the Being who is worshipped, the propriety of addressing him in this manner: inquiries will terminate in a conviction of the truth and divine authority of religion, as well as the necessity of social worship.

It is much to be lamented, that those distinctions of rank and station, which prevail in social life, however necessary for preserving proper subordination and for carrying on the purposes of society, frequently leave an unfavourable impression upon the character, inducing some to value themselves for these honours, to neglect more important distinctions, and to despise their brother, who is placed in a lower condition, and leading others to think more lightly of themselves and of human nature than the dignity of that nature requires. But, in the presence of the sovereign ruler, of the Supreme Lord, these distinctions will disappear and be lost. In his presence and in his estimation nothing is regarded but moral worth; every other distinction ap-

pears vain. Those who come to him are, therefore, taught to divest themselves for a time of their artificial authority, and to consider their fellow worshippers as their brethren and equals, as Christians, perhaps their superiours. No one can deny, then, that these services are calculated to teach a lesson of humility, to abate the pride of rank and station, to elevate the dejected spirit of the lower orders of mankind, and to inspire all with a spirit of mutual candour and good will.

I must desire it to be remembered, that in the preceding reasoning to enforce the propriety of social worship, nothing has been said or insinuated, that can be construed as in the smallest degree reflecting upon those excellent characters, who from principles of conscience have withdrawn from a form of worship, which they deemed calculated to countenance and perpetuate pernicious errours, and to establish another better suited in their apprehension to the simplicity of the Gospel or to promote Christian edification, or who, when this could not be accomplished, have chosen to worship in private, and to abstain entirely from what is public. To attend such worship would, as far as the act of an individual can go, be to sanction and confirm what the heart condemns and reason disapproves. Publicly to protest against it may be an act of allegiance due to the supremacy of the Divine Being or to the authority of Christ, a sacrifice to the interests of truth and the welfare of mankind.

To social worship it has been objected, that it proceeds from an ostentatious display of devotion, and is expressly condemned by Jesus himself, who says to his disciples, "when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are; for they love to pray standing in the synagogues, and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men: verily I say unto you, they have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy father, who is in secret, and thy father, who seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly." But this prohibition extends only to private prayer offered to God in public from an affectation of devotion, and has no reference to the joint presentation of one common address to the Divine Being, in which all unite. This meaning of the passage is so obvious, that I think it unnecessary to spend any more time in the discussion of so plain a question.

Another objection is more plausible, although not more valid. If social worship be necessary, times and seasons must be appointed for it's celebration; and we may be summoned to attend, when the heart is not in a proper frame, when the mind is averse from the work in which it is called to engage. Are we, then, to force the mind, it may be asked, to do that against which it revolts? Are we to offer to God the sacrifice of an unwilling mind? If offered, will he approve of and accept the sacrifice? Can there be any merit in services, which are

constrained, which are as regular and mechanical as the index of the dial, that points out the hour of the day?

It is doubtless desirable, that the mind of every man should be so well disciplined, that his character be so perfect, as that the judgment and the affections should always move the same way, that whatever appears to be right to the one should be felt to be pleasant by the other: but seldom, alas! is such perfection to be found in human beings. The judgment and the passions are too often opposed to each other, and draw us different ways. Yet that circumstance creates no difficulty, in the opinion of a wise man, respecting the mode of conduct which he ought to pursue; and the rule, recommended in ordinary cases of this kind, may serve for our direction on the present occasion. If it be said, do what you think to be right, whether agreeable to the inclinations, or otherwise, time and repeated practice will render it pleasant; I will also say, attend the services of social worship, notwithstanding that at first they may be performed with reluctance. Habit will render them agreeable, and even add a pleasure to the performance of them, which cannot be derived from any other source.

This subjugation of the conduct to the judgment, of the affections to the will, while it is the parent of true wisdom, is also the most acceptable sacrifice which an imperfect creature can render to it's creator.

If there be any force in the preceding reasoning,

social worship is founded upon the nature and constitution of man: it is necessary to the improvement and perfection of his moral character, to the fulfilment of his Christian duty. In the opinion of a wise and ingenuous mind it needs no other recommendation.

Allow me to add, that it is with no small satisfaction that I meet you on the present occasion. I perceive, that the opinion I have been endeavouring to establish and recommend is yours, that you anticipate my wishes, and furnish a satisfactory pledge, that the service which flows from the joint dictates of the heart and understanding will not be discontinued.

SERMON XXII.

THE FEAR OF THE LORD, THE ONLY SURE GUIDE TO A COMPLETE KNOWLEDGE AND UNIFORM PRACTICE OF VIRTUE.

PSALM cxi, 10.

The Fear of the Lord is the Beginning of Wisdom.

WISDOM, when it occurs in the Book of Psalms and Proverbs, does not always signify, as in common life, the choice of proper means for accomplishing a certain end, but most frequently a right moral conduct, or that ability to discern our duty and disposition to practise it, which lead to universal righteousness. In this sense the author of the ninetieth Psalm seems to use the term, when he prays; "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." And it is evidently in the same sense, that the writer of the Book of Proverbs uses it, when he says; "Happy is the man that findeth wisdom;" that is, as the succeeding words show; happy is the man, who hath acquired a knowledge of his duty, and practises it, "and the man that getteth understanding; for the merchandize of it is better than the merchandize of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies; and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her:

length of days is in her right hand and in her left hand riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her, and happy is every one that retaineth her." On the other hand, vice is called folly, and described to be as odious and mischievous, as wisdom is useful and valuable. The beginning of this wisdom, we are told in the text, is the fear of the Lord; that is, a regard to God, a belief of his being, and respect to his authority, lay the best foundation for a right moral conduct: such a fear is the surest guide to the discovery of our duty, and furnishes the best motives for the practice of it. This is the assertion of the Psalmist; and what I now propose is, to examine the justness of it in respect to the three great divisions of our duty, into divine, personal, and social.

That a respect for God should lead to the performance of the duties we owe to him, there seems no reason to question; for it is it's natural and obvious tendency. To revere a friend in our hearts, and to show him respect in our external behaviour; to comply as far as we are able with his wishes, and to avoid whatever is offensive, are considered to be so intimately connected, as to be regarded as one and the same thing. He that should profess to feel the one, and not manifest the other, must be pronounced insincere.

It is possible, however, that men may have recourse to very erroneous methods of expressing their respect for the divine Being, which may be so far from being acceptable to him or agreeable to their duty, as to be directly contrary to both. Thus, some conceiving of him as an angry and revengeful being, who delighted in severity, have attempted to appease his anger and to recover his favour, when they had offended him, by acts of severity to themselves, by retiring from society into solitude, by abstaining from food, or using such as was scanty or unwholesome, by afflicting their persons, or by practising some such other methods of mortification and self denial, as their own imaginations might recommend. The idea such persons have formed of the Deity is that of a man of an unrelenting temper, who can never be induced to pardon those who have offended or injured him, except they have suffered much for their offences. They have, therefore, thought, that to become miserable was to render themselves acceptable, and that the more wretched they could make themselves, the better they were prepared for being restored to his favour.

Such persons may, indeed, be said to fear God, and to do these things from that motive; but they have wholly mistaken the character of the great Father of mankind, and fallen hereby into the most wretched superstition. The leading object of his government is to communicate pleasure, to multiply

our enjoyments rather than to lessen them, to make men happy and not miserable; nor can we please him better than by cooperating with him in this benevolent design. It is true there is evil in his dispensations as well as good, but it is only evil as the means of doing good, as the instrument of correcting the temper and purifying the character of his children. Whenever it has not this tendency, he neither employs it himself, nor approves of it's being employed by others. If men have offended him by their ill conduct, the best atonement they can make is repentance and amendment. Acts of self denial and mortification, which answer no other purpose than that of rendering the perrson, by whom they are practised, wretched, must be offensive in his sight. These mistakes, however, which proceed from unworthy notions of the divine Being, are not to be attributed to the fear of God, as recommended in Scripture, which is founded upon rational and exalted views of his government and character. This teaches us to seek the favour of God by endeavouring to resemble his character in purity and moral excellence, and to avoid his displeasure by abstaining from every thing that is base and dishonourable. It teaches us to hate evil and to love goodness, as the only sure means of recommending ourselves to his regards.

Into how much folly, vice, and wretchedness men will be plunged, who are destitute of this salutary fear, or fix their fear upon a wrong object, the

history of the heathen world will abundantly testify; for they ascribed divine qualities and paid divine honours, not only to men like themselves, but to beasts and reptiles, to the inanimate parts of nature, the sun and moon and stars, and even to evil beings, distinguished for cruelty, lust, and other evil passions. The services, by which they attempted to recommend themselves to the favour of such objects of worship, corresponded with the ideas they had previously formed of their characters, being unmeaning and absurd, cruel and impure. To commit acts of lewdness and fornication, to prostitute the person, to put to death unoffending individuals, both men and infants, were considered as acts of religion, and as recommending the persons by whom they were performed to the favour of the deity. The effects, which such opinions and practices must have upon the human character, may be easily conjectured; they sunk mankind into the lowest state of vice and depravity.

From this state they have been in some degree recovered by the Gospel of Christ, which introduced them to the knowledge of the true God, an almighty, all wise, and perfectly good Being; and they would have been recovered completely from it, had not mistaken notions of the deity again prevailed, and been accompanied with a like train of evils, nor can we justly expect, that the human character will ever attain that perfection, of which it is capable, until

men have acquired perfectly just views of the object of supreme veneration.

II. A regard to the will of God furnishes the best rule for those duties which men owe to themselves, or for personal virtue. Of this no doubt can be entertained, if we consider, that God is the being, who gave us that constitution of body and mind we possess, who knows, therefore, what powers he has bestowed upon us, and what we are capable of doing for our own improvement and happiness; and if we further recollect, that he loves us as his children, and that he can require nothing from us but what is conducive to our welfare.

On the subject of personal virtue two questions will necessarily occur to us, but which we shall not always find it easy to resolve by the dictates of our own understandings. What am I able to do? and how much am I able to bear? Can I resist the violence of passion, and lay it under restraint, or is it's influence incontrollable? Are the evils of life capable of being borne with contentment and patience, or are they often insupportable? Now, in each of these cases, a love of ease or a desire of excusing our own misconduct will suggest such an answer, as would be destructive of every personal good quality. For they will tell us, if we consult them, that the appetites of the body are so headstrong and impetuous that it is necessary to gratify them, and that temperance is impracticable, that pride is so natural to man that it cannot be checked, and that we do right,

when the evils of life amount to a certain magnitude, to murmur at our lot, or to adopt any method that may be suggested for removing them. Such are the dictates of self love. It is necessary, therefore, to have recourse to a more impartial guide; and such a guide we find in the supreme Being. For, if he require us to observe the rules of temperance and to lay our appetites under restraint, it must be, not because he can envy us any kind or degree of enjoyment we are capable of possessing, (for it would be absurd to suppose, that after having furnished us with a capacity of receiving pleasure, he should forbid us to exercise it, that he should put the cup to our lips, and then forbid us to taste it), but because this moderation in our enjoyments is necessary to preserve the health of the body and to secure the continuance of pleasure, and because he knows we are capable of practising such a degree of self denial. If he command us to be patient and contented under the calamities of life, it is because he knows such a temper of mind to be attainable, and conducive to internal peace and self enjoyment. Here, then, we have a sure and infallible guide, which we may trust upon all occasions. Some will perhaps say, that self interest would alone lead us to the practice of every personal virtue, since there is no excellence of this kind which does not contribute to the happiness of the individual, and which a man's regard for himself ought not to induce him to cultivate; and that this is true of the virtues to be exercised toward

others, as well as of those which relate immediately to ourselves, for that to be kind and forbearing toward our brethren is the way to procure kindness and forbearance for ourselves. It must be acknowledged that truly enlightened self interest would produce this effect; since our duty and real happiness are necessarily connected together, and cannot possibly be distinct and separate, if we take into our account the whole of our existence. But he, who should never act until he sees the connection betweeen the action and his happiness, must in many instances neglect his duty; for how often will it happen, that this connection cannot be perceived on account of future and distant consequences? Nay, how often will cases occur, in which our duty will appear wholly inconsistent with our interest, and where nothing but a regard to the favour of God and the rewards of a future life could induce us to make the sacrifices required? Who, for instance, could be induced to sacrifice his life in support of the truth, except from some such motive? On the other hand, the temptation to some vices is so strong, and the evils which arise from them in this life appear so inconsiderable and uncertain, that nothing would enable us to resist it, but the prospect of a righteous retribution from the hand of God.

How unsafe it is to trust to the decisions of our own reason in regard to our personal conduct is evident from experience as well as reason. Those, who have not been guided in their researches after

their duty by the will of God as communicated to mankind by revelation, have fallen into the grossest errours. The Epicureans and other sects of antiquity placed man's chief good in the possession of sensual pleasure, in which he was to indulge himself without restraint as long as he was able; and, when it could no longer be enjoyed and life became a burden, they recommended to him suicide as the means of delivering himself from trouble. Even the Stoics, who professed to despise pain and to place their happiness in virtue, yet allowed and encouraged this practice. Referring to this it was their favourite maxim; if the house be smoky, the door is open, and you may walk out. What they thus recommended upon principle, we are not to be surprised if they frequently practised. Even Cato, with all the heroism and magnanimity of his character, was guilty of this fault.

From modern unbelievers, aided by the superiour light and information of later times, better things may perhaps be expected; yet we shall find them also falling into the same errours. By a philosopher of a neighbouring kingdom it is asserted, that the love of pleasure is the voice of God; which pleasure he represents as consisting in gratifying the senses, and in procuring the means of gratifying them. Upon this pleasure, therefore, he would have no restraint imposed. By several modern unbelievers self murder has been recommended, and

with consistency enough practised upon themselves.

Their notions are equally lax upon other subjects of morals. Mr. Hume, the most enlightened man among this class of persons, places pride and a certain degree of self valuation among the personal virtues, and will not allow that character to humility and self denial, which, he says, answer no purpose. Lord Bolingbroke will not allow, that the sanctions of virtue extend to men as individuals, and only affect them as members of society; which at once destroys all obligation to personal virtue. If sincerity and integrity be allowed the rank of virtues, yet there are many occasions, it seems, that will justify the violation of them. Mr. Hobbes has advanced, that to practise idolatry through fear of death is no crime; and others, arguing upon the same principles, have ridiculed Christians for dying martyrs to the truth.

Lord Herbert, who has been held up to public view as a conscientious deist, says, that those are not to be lightly condemned who are carried to sin by their bodily constitution, and that they are no more to be blamed than a dropsical person for his immoderate thirst.

I could mention several other instances of their maintaining principles equally loose and pernicious; but these are sufficient to convince us, that the most enlightened minds, unassisted by revelation, are very unsafe guides on the subject of personal virtue,

and that the will of God alone can afford an unerring rule.

III. I am to inquire, how far the will of God will afford such a rule in respect to social virtues, or the duties which men owe to one another.

Now, as God is the father of all, it is evident, that he must wish the happiness of others as well as of us, and that he can prescribe no rule for the conduct of men toward one another, which is not calculated to promote the general welfare. If he say, "You shall not kill; you shall not steal; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not bear false witness;" he can have no motive for such prohibitions but a persuasion, that these practices would prove injurious to mankind. On the other hand, if he require truth, fidelity, charity, compassion, forgiveness of injuries, it must be from a like persuasion, that these virtues are necessary to the peace and well being of society. In following both his injunctions and prohibitions, therefore, we are with certainty led to the great object of social virtue—social happiness.

It may be imagined, indeed, that proposing to our own selves the good of others will furnish us with as safe a guide, and that, in following this maxim, we cannot possibly injure mankind, but must necessarily promote their happiness. But it should be remembered, that we are in many instances very imperfect judges of the tendency of actions, and may easily fall into the mistake of supposing that a course of con-

duct, which is useful, will be prejudicial, and the contrary; in which case we shall do harm, where we intended to do good, or neglect to do it, where we have an opportunity. But, in following the opinion of him, who is ever actuated by the love of all his offspring, and sees the most distant consequences of things, we cannot err.

There is another principle, which may be supposed to be a sufficient guide for our conduct on all occasions, independently of any regard to the will of God, and that is conscience, or, as some denominate it, the moral sense, by which we are led to approve some actions and characters, and to condemn others, from an inward sense of their excellence or deformity, and without regard to any good or evil consequences which may arise from them. This inward feeling of approbation or disapprobation some have supposed to arise from a natural instinct, implanted in our breasts by the author of our natures, in order to guide us at all times to the practice of our duty, and which is, therefore, supposed to be the same in all men. That conscience is in most cases an excellent guide cannot be denied, nor that it is better to follow a mistaken conscience than to act in opposition to it's dictates. But that it sometimes grossly mistakes is evident from this consideration, that it not unfrequently dictates opposite things to different persons, which could not be the case if it were an invariable standard of truth and right; and sometimes impels men to violate the plainest principles of humanity,

leading them to think, that to destroy men is to do God service. In such cases, by what rule are the errours of conscience to be corrected? What superior authority is there, to which conscience itself will yield? Is there any better guide to which we can trust than the will of God?

That men may fall into great errours on the subject of social duties, although they are the plainest and best understood of any, is not a mere conjecture, but supported by numerous and striking facts, as we have already shown in regard to personal virtue. What can be more clear than the obligation to compassion, to speak truth, and observe the laws of chastity? Yet Epictetus, one of the most celebrated moralists of antiquity, allows a wise man to condole, indeed, *in words*, with his friends when in distress; but tells him to take care, that he feel no compassion. The Stoics allowed, that lying might be practised where it was profitable; and even Plato said, that a man might tell a lie, provided he could do it at a proper time. Scarcely any vice can have a more pernicious influence upon society than unrestrained commerce of the sexes; yet there was nothing in which the heathens allowed men to indulge themselves with greater liberty: fornication was represented by their wisest philosophers as no vice at all. And although adultery was punished by the law in some states, it was frequently practised, and justified by the greatest pretenders to wisdom. Those vices also which are justly termed

unnatural, and which modern manners will hardly allow us so much as to mention, were practised by the most celebrated instructors of youth and teachers of wisdom among the Greeks, and gloried in. Nay the public laws of several states gave them their countenance. So much were the notions of moral rectitude corrupted and the human character debased, where revelation was not known: and were we to examine the opinions of modern unbelievers on these subjects, we should find the principles they maintained not less licentious.

It is true indeed, that among those who are denominated Christians, men are to be found, who practise these and every other species of vice; but they do not pretend to justify their vices by the principles of their religion, nor are those who practise them acknowledged as brethren by the general body of Christians.

We have now seen, that the will of God is an infallible rule of duty and the best foundation for good morals, and that men, in neglecting it to follow any other guide, whether reason, self interest, a desire to do good, or even conscience itself, are liable to be misled, and must necessarily fall into a variety of errours.

From this subject we may, therefore, learn the value of piety or of reverence, esteem, and love for the Supreme Being. It furnishes the only principle of duty, which will direct us aright upon all occasions. Whatever light we derive from other guides

on this subject, cases will occur, where they will either desert or mislead us; but this is a never failing friend and guide. If we judge of the value of a principle by it's effects, there is no acquisition more worthy of our esteem than this is; for there is nothing which produces such happy consequences. Yet piety is not so much respected in the world as one might be led to expect from it's great excellence. By many it is viewed, if not with contempt, yet with great indifference, as occupying the lowest place among human virtues; while in fact it merits the highest place; while the benevolent character is esteemed and caressed by all. So highly is it valued, and so general is the opinion of it's supreme excellence, that acts of benevolence are considered and spoken of as constituting the very essence of goodness, and as being virtue itself. The reason of this preference it is not difficult to discover. Piety is confined to the mind, or can only manifest itself by acts, which are known to ourselves and the Supreme Being, and is often professed where it is not really felt, and assumed only to cover the worst designs and the vilest hypocrisy. On this account, as the pretensions to it have often proved ill founded, it has fallen into contempt. Whereas the effects of benevolence are conspicuous to all, and felt by many as well as seen.

Yet if these two virtues be weighed in the balance of justice, there will be no doubt to which the superiority belongs. Piety, where it is genuine, is a

certain principle of right conduct, and leads to or includes in it every other virtue, and benevolence with the rest. But benevolence does not always imply piety; for a considerable deal of good may be done to men, where there is no regard to God and not much good will to men, either for the sake of the applause which accompanies it, or the power which it communicates, or from some other sinister motive; in which case it ceases to be virtuous, and, when founded on such principles, will not in fact perform any extensive good to the world; for when any offensive services are to be performed for mankind, this kind of benevolence will give a man no aid. It leads him to desert his duty, as soon as that duty renders him obnoxious; but here it is that piety would have given him effectual support.

But, although the virtue of which I have been speaking is thus lightly esteemed by the generality of mankind, those who possess it themselves, who have experienced with what difficulty it is acquired, and know what happy effects it produces, have learnt to place upon it a proper value: by them it is regarded as the first and best quality of the human mind.

Secondly, we may learn what mischief they are doing to the world, who endeavour to make men discard revelation, which furnishes us with the most certain and satisfactory account of the perfections and administration of God. They are destroying the foundation of good morals; they are labouring

to deprive us of the only stable principle of goodness; they would carry us out to sea and there leave us, without a rudder, without compass, without any thing that can direct us to a safe passage. And shall men listen to such advisers, after being accustomed to look for their duty in divine revelation, as contained in the Scriptures, for so many ages? Are they now to go and learn it from other masters? Are they to go and learn truth from Plato; humility from Hume; compassion from Stoics; and purity from Grecian philosophers? What inexcusable folly to go back from light to darkness, from an infallible guide to one that is fallible and erroneous! If ever it take place, cursed will be the day on which such folly began: it will be big with mischief to the human race.

Lastly; if piety be the source of so much good, and the want of it the cause of so much evil, let us take care to cultivate it in our own hearts and in those of others. To animate our endeavours in this important work, let the maxim of the text be engraven upon our hearts and ever present to our minds, that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."

SERMON XXIII.

THE MORAL SENSE.

PSALM XV, 4.

In whose Eyes a vile Person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the Lord.

IN the last verse of the Psalm, which precedes that from which these words are taken, there is an evident reference to the state of a part of the children of Israel during the unnatural rebellion of Absalom. At that time David, the author of the Psalm, and the few faithful servants who remained attached to his interests, were obliged to quit Jerusalem, the immediate residence of God, and to retire to a distant part of the country, where their situation might justly be represented as like that of captives in a foreign land. Referring to this, he closes the fourteenth Psalm with this exclamation: "O that the salvation of Israel were come out of Sion! when the Lord bringeth back the captivity of his people, Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad." The principal evil, which David felt and lamented in this situation, was not the being driven from home and from his capital, but the being removed to a distance from the ark of God, and prevented from attending public worship in the tabernacle, as he had been used to

do. This was a grievous mortification to him, as it deprived him of his wonted pleasures, and seemed an evident mark of the divine displeasure. His servants indeed at first attempted to carry the ark after him in his flight, in order that he might have the satisfaction of worshipping God before it, and of consulting him upon emergencies. But he directed Zadok the priest to carry it back to it's place, saying, "Carry back the ark of God into the city: if I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me again, and show me both it and his habitation."

In this situation, considering himself as having incurred this mark of displeasure by his offences, it was natural for him to inquire, what excellencies of character were requisite to secure a constant residence near the ark, and the enjoyments of an honour, of which he had lately been deprived; and it seems to be with this view, that the fifteenth Psalm, whence the text is taken, was composed.

It begins with proposing this question; "Lord, who shall abide (not "in thy tabernacle," as in our translation; for no one had his residence within the tabernacle, but) near thy tabernacle? "Who shall dwell near thy holy hill?" To this question an answer is made in the following verses by a description of the character, which would be worthy of this honour: "He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart;" which description is continued to the end of the

Psalm, and concludes with these words, which prove, in my apprehension, the interpretation now given to be the true one, "He that doeth these things, shall never be moved," that is, he shall enjoy an undisturbed residence near the tabernacle, he shall never be driven thence as long as he lives. This is language, which could not with any propriety be applied to a residence within the tabernacle; for no excellence of character would qualify a man for living constantly there.

Many persons indeed suppose, that by the tabernacle of God and the hill of God, David intends, not the visible residence of the divine Being among the children of Israel in this world, but Heaven the seat of his glory, and the place destined for good men after death, and that the object of the Psalm is to describe the qualifications which are necessary to fit them for this blessed mansion. But I recollect no place in the Old Testament, in which Heaven, is called by the name of the tabernacle or hill of God; and it is not likely that the Psalmist, without any previous notice, would introduce a new language. That language first occurs in the epistle to the Hebrews, in which almost every term belonging to the mosaic institution is applied to whatever bore any resemblance to it under the Christian dispensation, without asserting, however, that they had originally this double meaning.

My intention at this time is to insist upon one part only of the description here given of the man, who

is qualified for enjoying the honour above referred to: "In his eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the Lord." And with this design I observe, first, that good men esteem or honour those of mankind, who are of a like disposition with themselves, on account of their goodness, and independently of any other consideration. Secondly, I shall endeavour to show, how this esteem is acquired; and, in the third place, make some inferences for the practical improvement of the subject.

First, then, good men are esteemed and honoured by those of a like character. You see I apply the observation to the whole of the religious character; for although it is confined in the text to fearing God, which is only one branch of goodness, yet that expression, as in other passages of Scripture, is to be understood of the whole of religion; which is so denominated, because it has it's foundation in the fear of the divine Being. For the justness of the observation we must appeal to the experience of mankind. On this ground I have no scruple in saying, that, if we be really good ourselves, in whomsoever we see piety, humility, resignation, submission, gratitude toward God; benevolence, charity, generosity, compassion, humility, gratitude toward men; and temperance, patience, contentment, with respect to our own private enjoyments and sufferings; if we possess these virtues ourselves, we shall behold them with satisfaction and pleasure in others, love and esteem those by whom they are possessed,

be glad to enjoy their company, and show them every mark of respect and honour in our power, in preference to other men.

That persons of the character I have been describing feel this esteem and affection for one another, few will pretend to doubt; but that there are many who will attribute it to a different cause, and say that it arises, not from the virtues they possess, as here supposed, but from early intercourse, from interest, from talents, wealth, or similarity of religious opinions, or from some other cause, and that goodness has no share in producing them. If therefore, I can show, that it subsists independently of these motives, and even in opposition to them, I shall establish the truth of what the Psalmist asserts.

It must be acknowledged, that mutual intercourse produces mutual affection. To persons, who have been trained with us in the same place of education, who have been engaged in the same pursuits, or partaken of the same pleasures, we feel ourselves strongly attached. The society of such old acquaintance, the companions of our youth and of our riper years, is pleasant to us independently of other causes; and the pleasure is felt afresh every time the intercourse is renewed. But the satisfaction, which arises from the contemplation of virtuous characters, is received from persons, to whom we are entire strangers, and whom we have never seen; from those who have been long since laid in the grave, or who never had a real exist-

ence; the worthies of past ages, whom we read of only in history; or characters which have been described by the pen of fiction. In producing respect for such characters former intercourse could have no influence; for there has been no opportunity for cultivating it. A like reason may be given for saying, that it cannot arise from benefits conferred; for although we may receive favours from the dead, and be greatly benefitted by the good effects of the wise instructions and good conduct of our forefathers, which may produce a strong feeling of gratitude in our minds, there must be something else to excite feelings of esteem, where the character is ideal, or where we have no connection with the object of our regard.

If the esteem, of which I have been speaking, do not arise from the causes just mentioned, it may be supposed to proceed from the accidental distinctions of wealth and power, which have great influence over some minds. The man of large possessions, the occupier and proprietor of a splendid mansion, adorned with the elegancies of dress, accomplished in polished manners, and surrounded with numerous attendants ready to obey the slightest intimation of his will, this man is an object of high respect to many; they approach his person with awe, and treat with deference every thing he says or does. This respect is still farther increased, if to the splendour of wealth be also added the dignity of high station: to their united authority there are many, who bow

with little less than adoration. But the respect of which I am speaking is of a very different nature: it is felt for the poor as well as for the rich; for those who have no property, as well as for those who have much; for individuals in private stations, as well as for men in public ones. It does not depend upon outward circumstances, but upon the qualities and dispositions of the mind. Wherever virtue is found, it is esteemed and honoured; and where it is wanting, although the man be clothed in purple and fine linen, the character is contemned.

More rational is the respect, which is shown to great knowledge and extraordinary endowments of mind. Those who can despise wealth, and consider it as adding no dignity to the possessor, yet regard these as just objects of veneration. In honouring wisdom and knowledge they are only honouring some of the excellencies which compose the character of an all perfect Being. But the respect of which I speak is different from that which is felt for knowledge or genius. It has often for it's object men, who are by no means distinguished by these qualities, men of plain understanding and little learning, but adorned with the moral virtues.

The disciples of Jesus had not the recommendation of wealth, or of the more captivating endowments of the mind, being men of ordinary understanding and no education, poor fishermen and mechanics; yet were they esteemed by their master, and treated by him with respect, because he disco-

vered in them the traces of an upright mind, and a readiness to embrace the truth.

There remains but one cause more, to which the esteem, which good men feel for one another, can with any colour of justice be attributed, and that is similarity of sentiment. It may be supposed, that as they think alike upon the great subject of religion and morals, their mutual affection is no more than what men of the same sect and party feel for one another, an affection of little value in itself, and tending rather to debase than exalt the character.

It must be admitted, that there are some principles, which are believed by all virtuous characters; nor is it possible they should be of the same disposition and feel mutual affection, unless they held some things in common. Yet, while there are some important articles, about which they agree, there are several others, about which they differ; but that difference does not destroy mutual regard. Virtuous and candid minds will view with sincere respect and esteem all those, who appear to possess the genuine fear of God, however opposite to their own their opinions may be respecting many parts of the divine administration and government, and other topics of religion. Many pernicious errours, indeed, are embraced, which may sour the temper, and lead to superstitious practices, but enough of the essentials of Christianity is retained to lay a foundation for undissembled piety toward the supreme Being, and disinterested benevolence toward

men; and wherever these appear, they attract regard. It is true, however, and much to be lamented, that men of different persuasions in religion, instead of loving and esteeming one another, often discover every mark of aversion and hatred. But I trust there are examples enow in the world of an opposite nature to convince us, that mutual esteem is perfectly consistent with a considerable difference of religious sentiment. It appears, then, that good men have a respect and esteem for one another, which does not depend upon mutual intercourse, upon the reception of benefits, the possession of wealth or talents, or even upon a similarity in religious opinions: it must, therefore, proceed solely from a regard to the virtues of their characters. We are now to inquire in the second place, whence this esteem arises. Why do good men love and honour those, who resemble them? Why do they contemplate their characters with admiration and pleasure? Why is virtue agreeable, and vice odious? To this some answer by saying, that the divine Being, in order to secure the practice of virtue among his creatures, implanted in their minds a kind of instinct which leads all men, independently of reason and reflection, to approve of some actions and to condemn others, to admire and be pleased with virtue, wherever it is to be found and under whatever disguises concealed, and to hate and abhor vice, however dignified or exalted, just as the palate is formed to be pleased with one kind of food and

to reject another, or as the eye is made to be pleased with light, and the ear with melody. This faculty, on account of it's supposed resemblance to some of our senses, they have called the moral sense.

Others have answered this inquiry by saying, that there is an eternal fitness in some actions and unfitness in others, and that our reason, by perceiving the one or the other, occasions the feelings of approbation or dislike.

But there is a much better method of accounting for the formation of the moral sense than either of those now suggested, which is briefly this: the mind in a child, when it first comes into the world, exists without impressions from the different objects with which it is surrounded, and to the influences of which it is exposed, and only possesses a capacity of receiving them. And it is the earliest business of those, to whom the care of our first years are committed, to inculcate, that certain actions are good, pleasant, honourable, fit, and worthy both of praise and reward, and that others are odious, painful, shameful, and deserving of punishment. The application of these terms by those, whose authority we respect, occasions the first symptoms of liking and disliking in our minds.

These feelings are further strengthened by observing the evil consequences which flow from certain vices, and the good effects which arise from the contrary virtues; from seeing, for instance, that intemperance produces disease and pain, want and

debility of mind, that the opposite virtue of temperance is attended with health, with the good opinion of mankind, with long life and plenty; that anger, and malice, and envy, produce returns of the same passions from others, and are the occasion of injuries, reproaches, and disquietude, while forbearance and benevolence procure a return of kind offices, with friendly intercourse and the highest praises. This observation raises in us a love and esteem for virtue and a hatred of vice in others.

This esteem and hatred, which are founded upon a view of the good and evil consequences of certain actions, come at length to be felt upon the sight of virtue and vice, without considering whether it be a source of benefit to ourselves or otherwise. But our progress toward this state of mind is greatly hastened by reflecting upon what the Scriptures teach us, that there is an almighty and righteous Being, who will punish in a future life what we see to be attended with so many evil consequences in this, and reward there in a more ample manner what is accompanied with much good here. This prospect will, more than any other consideration, inspire us with a love of piety, virtue, and benevolence, and a horrour of the contrary; and, being often repeated, will at length settle into a fixed attachment to the one and aversion from the other; without any immediate regard to future consequences; our nature being so formed, that what we like or dislike, approve or disapprove, for any particular reason, we

come in time to view with these sentiments, without reflecting upon the reason, which first produced that state of mind.

In this manner is the moral sense, as it has been called, formed, and becomes the most useful faculty we possess; for it leads us to admire piety and virtue wherever they appear, and to love those by whom they are possessed; to dislike impiety and wickedness, under whatever disguises they may be concealed, and to despise the character, which is stained with them. This faculty, when exercised about our own actions and occasioning pleasure or remorse, is called conscience. It exists in some degree in almost every mind; for if we do not receive the above impressions from education, yet we acquire them afterwards, although in a much more imperfect manner, from our intercourse with mankind, in which we hear and see good actions and dispositions commended and rewarded, and the contrary condemned and punished. In virtuous characters, however, the dictates of this faculty are overpowered by sense, passion, and interest; in virtuous minds it's influence is stronger than that of any other principle.

I come now to make some inferences from the subject.

First, then, from the subject we have been considering we may draw encouragement to the practice of our duty. It is the way to get honour and esteem, the honour and esteem of the wise and good,

whose opinion is alone worth regarding, and to receive such acts of kindness as their friendship is able to perform for us. It is the peculiar excellence of this friendship too, that it is not liable to be killed or destroyed by those causes which produced a change in worldly attachments, by an alteration in opinion or condition. The friendship which is formed upon early intercourse, upon gratitude for favours received, upon similarity of opinion, upon the possession of wealth or talents, is as fleeting and unstable as the gifts of fortune. Let but trouble arise, and these friends will soon forsake you; let but a change take place in your opinions, and they will discard you from their acquaintance for ever; cease to partake with them of the same pleasures, and they will cease to give you their regard. But that friendship, which is procured by the good qualities of the mind, will last as long as these qualities continue, that is, through every change of external condition, and through every period of life.

Fear God then, and do good; be prudent and temperate. And although you may not obtain the favour of the great, yet be assured, that there are a few at least, whose esteem you will not fail to obtain, which will be of more real service to you in your passage through life than the friendship of the most exalted of mankind.

II. The description, which is here given of the temper of a good man, that he honoureth them that

fear the Lord, may furnish us with a useful test whereby to judge of our own characters.

Who are the persons we most admire and honour? Are they the pious and benevolent, however mean their condition, however inferiour their talents, however remote from us in situation, however unconnected by obligation? Or are they the great, the rich, the men of genius and knowledge, the members of our own fraternity in religion? If the former, by valuing goodness in others we show that we possess it ourselves; we are furnished with satisfactory evidence of the excellence of our own character, on which we may reflect with pleasure. But if the persons, in whose company we take the greatest delight, be of the latter description, it is a plain proof, that we have not acquired that perfection of the moral sense, which is necessary to form a virtuous character, and to maintain a right conduct. We are in a state of mind, which exposes us to the influence of every temptation, and makes us capable of the highest degree of depravity.

But, Thirdly, the account just given of the manner in which a relish for excellence is acquired, may afford encouragement to those, by whom it has not yet been attained. You are defective in a very essential article of goodness, you are destitute of moral taste and discernment; but the defect is not incapable of remedy. It is not through the want of an original instinct, which nothing but the immediate hand of God can supply, or of those rational

faculties, the possession of which is necessary to discern the fitness of things, but through your own negligence, or that of those to whom the care of your early years was entrusted, that you are without an important and useful talent, which, however, it is in your own power to acquire. For this purpose let me intreat you seriously to reflect on the grand principles, upon which a virtuous temper and conduct are formed, and which give it it's first lustre in the eyes of a rational being; that it is the means of happiness to the individual and to society. Carefully examine for yourselves, whether it have not this tendency, that your own judgment may be first convinced; and then endeavour to aid the reflections of your own minds by reading the writings and hearing the discourses of others, but more especially by reading what is written in the sacred Scriptures. The important sanctions, by which virtue is there recommended, cannot fail to make an impression upon your minds; but satisfy not yourselves with one conviction, or with a single impression: it is only by often meditating upon the same things, and viewing them in the same light, that a moral sense and an admiration of excellence of character can be acquired. If the progress you make toward the object of your wishes be slow and gradual, be not hereby discouraged; for it is necessarily the work of time and labour, and will be at length effectual.

SERMON XXIV.

AGAINST INDIFFERENCE TO RELIGIOUS TRUTH.

II THESS. ii, 10.

Because they received not the Love of the Truth.

THESE words are a part of that celebrated portion of the epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians, in which he foretels the grand apostacy. It seems, that these converts to the Christian religion had misinterpreted some expressions made use of by him in a former letter, and in consequence of it inferred, that the day of judgment was to take place immediately. This filled their minds with great alarms. The apostle, as soon as he heard of their apprehensions, wrote to them a second letter to rectify their mistake, in which he intreats them not to be troubled by any supposed verbal or epistolary revelation of his, as if the day of Christ were at hand; for that before that event there was to be a great falling away from the simplicity of Christian truth, which it would take many years to carry to it's full extent, and many more to correct.

This apostacy he represents under the figure of a man, whom he calls the man of sin, meaning however not an individual being, but a certain power, which may be exhibited in that character. He points out the exorbitant nature of his claims, when he

says, that he will exalt himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped, *i. e.* above the power of the civil magistrate, who in the language of prophecy is called *God.* The means, by which these exorbitant claims would be established, are likewise particularly specified. His coming is said to be with all power, and signs, and lying wonders, *i. e.* with false pretences to miracles. The cause of his success in such extraordinary pretensions and false proofs is mentioned in the text; it is because Christians who would be thus imposed upon would not love the truth, that is, they would feel no attachment to the Gospel of Christ in it's pure and simple state, but would be indifferent to it. This indifference would prevent them from making that opposition to the encroachments of errour and tyranny, which would be necessary for withstanding them with success, and would permit this antichristian power to establish itself upon the ruins of the Gospel.

Many persons have employed themselves since the period of the reformation in tracing the origin of this extraordinary perversion of the simple religion of Jesus, and have with good reason, I apprehend, attributed it to various causes; such as men's being ashamed of a crucified master; their having a desire to assimilate Christianity to Paganism, in order to make proselytes of those who were still Pagans, or to please those who, having become Christians, felt a hankering after their old ceremonies; to the conversion of learned heathens, who introduced their old

philosophy into their new religion; to the knavery and ambition of priests; and to several other circumstances, which separately or combined together produced this wonderful change. But all these causes would have produced no effect, had they not been aided by that which we have just mentioned, an indifference to the truth in those who professed the Gospel. This the apostle declares would be the grand source of the mischief. Accordingly, "while men slept the enemy sowed tares". The church of Rome is a vast fabric, the work of many centuries, in which one story has been piled upon another till it has reached the heavens; but how high soever it has risen, it rests upon an indifference to truth. This is the foundation, upon which the whole edifice is erected, and without which it could not have been raised. The apostle indeed mentions another reason afterward, as the ground of this corruption; for he tells us, that they would not only disbelieve the truth, but have pleasure in unrighteousness. The latter expression, however, is perhaps only to be regarded as an explanation of the former: those who love not the truth would be fond of those errours, upon which unrighteous claims and vicious practices would be founded. The natural consequences and just punishment of such a temper would be delusion and oppression.

I shall not now endeavour to show you the value of Christian truth, to which this passage refers, by pointing out it's tendency above every other system to im-

prove and perfect the human character, which however might easily be done; but taking it for granted, that every one will admit of the apostle's authority in assigning the cause of the grand apostacy in this prophetic declaration, I shall mention some instances, in which an indifference to truth, which has been described as being the cause of so much mischief, is manifested, in order that we may be on our guard against this pernicious principle, and avoid hereby the evils which others have suffered, or recover the truths which they have lost. It must be interesting to every one, who knows what are the symptoms of a disorder which has produced evils of so serious a nature, and more especially, if there be some who labour under the malady, without suspecting that they are afflicted with it.

I. Those are indifferent to Christian truth, who will not inquire into the foundation upon which it is built. Respecting some it may be observed, that whatever sentiments they have been taught in early life by their parents or other instructors they always retain, without once inquiring seriously, whether the religion they profess contain any evidence of having come from God, or whether what they have received from others as the religion of Jesus be really the genuine Christian doctrine. Such men *may possibly* be right in regard to what they believe, and may have embraced a faith, which the fullest inquiry would afford them no reason to change. But the goodness of their faith is wholly owing to

chance, and not to their own active exertions. With different instructors, they would have thought differently. They are now Christians and Protestants, because born in a Christian and Protestant country; but born at Rome, they would have been Papists, and at Constantinople Mahometans. Nor is there any system of religion so absurd, which men may not be taught to believe, if they receive it without inquiry.

I do not say, that such a faith is wholly useless, and that the Christian religion, implicitly believed, produces no good effects, for it may have considerable influence upon the conduct, upon whatever ground it is received: but it is evidently insecure. Let those who have such a faith be exposed to strong temptations, to vicious indulgences, let them only hear the arguments of unbelievers, and they will easily be induced first to doubt the truth of their religion, and afterward to renounce it altogether. Or while their faith in Christianity remains unshaken, let them hear inculcated by persons of authority and influence principles different from those which they have been used to believe, and let the reception of those principles be the way to distinction and fame, and they will readily embrace the new doctrine for the old. It was in this way, no doubt, that the early Christians were induced to embrace the errours of the grand apostacy; they had neglected to found their faith upon an examination of the Scriptures; and whatever ignorance and fraud might recommend

as sanctioned by their authority was easily imposed upon them for such. Whereas, had they been well acquainted with the writings of the evangelists and apostles, they could never have been induced to receive what was in direct opposition to their language.

What men value they are anxious to preserve, and will cheerfully submit to whatever toil and labour may be necessary for this purpose. Those, therefore, who will not inquire in the way I have mentioned, show an indifference to the truth; for they neglect to take proper measures for it's security: and, if it be not lost or corrupted in their hands, we must attribute it to the favour of divine providence, which keeps them out of the way of temptation, and not to any merit of theirs.

Some persons will perhaps say, however, that they have seen instances of men, who were once at least apparently confirmed Christians, who yet, by searching the Scriptures and inquiring into the grounds of their faith, gave up one article after another, till they had nothing left but the faith of the atheist (if that can be called *faith*, which consists in the disbelief of every thing); that the best proof, therefore, which they can give of their attachment to the truth, is not to inquire at all, lest their inquiry should issue in the utter renunciation of it.

That there have been examples of persons becoming unbelievers by inquiry cannot be doubted;

but those mistake, who attribute this change to a love of truth. Men often change their opinions from a desire of fame and an affectation of singularity, from a regard to worldly interest, or from some other motive equally improper. Such examples amount only to this, that ambitious and worldly minded men have found out by inquiry plausible excuses for renouncing their former faith, and for gratifying their former passions: they furnish no argument against free inquiry arising from a love of truth. Where this prevails, and where it is connected, as it always must be, with a love of virtue, there is no danger of men's becoming unbelievers by inquiry: on the contrary, this is the best method which they can pursue to establish their faith. Those who are afraid to inquire, because they are afraid they shall renounce all religious principle, act like those parents, who resolve to observe no fault in their children, lest they should be induced, as other parents have been, to quarrel with and abandon them entirely. We cannot say, that such parents have no regard for their children; but it is a blind and undiscerning affection, and far inferiour to what they feel, who resolve carefully to examine their behaviour in order to correct their faults.

Careful and even laborious investigation is the natural and necessary consequence of a genuine love of truth; and in vain is it that they pretend to it, who have never so much as inquired into the ground of their faith, nor taken any pains to reduce it to the

standard of Scripture. Those alone are the true lovers of wisdom in the estimation of Solomon, who dig for her as for silver, and search for her as for hidden treasure.

II. An indifference to truth is discovered by those, who, having acquired a knowledge of it, confine that knowledge to themselves.

There are men to be found in the world, who, laying aside all regard to early prejudices and to human authority, have formed their own opinion on subjects of Christian doctrine upon the best grounds, the evidence of reason and Scripture, yet suffer the knowledge they have thus acquired to lie within their own breasts, and never profess it to the world, or do it in such an ambiguous manner, that truth derives no benefit from their testimony. Although surrounded by others, who entertain the same sentiments, and who boldly and openly avow them, they have not the resolution to join in the avowal; but continue to associate with the patrons of errour, and cannot be distinguished from them, except perhaps by their most intimate friends. They dislike the trouble of defending an opinion, for which they must give some reason; or they are afraid of incurring the charge of vanity or presumption in thinking differently from the majority (especially where their opinion stands opposed to that of the great) and of hereby losing the good will of others, whose favour they wish to preserve; or the doctrines they have embraced are so obnoxious, that to profess them

would not only destroy their character and influence, but expose them to persecution and personal violence. For these reasons they never utter a word or perform an act, by which their sentiments can be fairly ascertained. If at one time they have given reason to suspect that they wish to favour the truth, they take care, by observing an opposite conduct at another time, to destroy the effect of what they had done.

In some respects this character may be said to be superiour to the preceding; for the mind is open to conviction, and some trouble has been taken to acquire the truth. But such men can have no claim to be called the genuine friends of truth, when they are ashamed or afraid to own it, and when the most trifling inconvenience is sufficient to prevent them from doing so. Of what service can the mere belief of a doctrine be, when those who oppose it are open and clamorous in their opposition? or how can any system of principles be preserved in the world, if there be no one who dares to profess them? Such timid advocates had genuine Christianity, when the man of sin appeared, and no wonder it proved an easy conquest.

As many persons are not aware of their obligations to make an open and uniform profession of the truth (which is the reverse of that which I have mentioned), although justly chargeable with indifference, where it is not practised, I shall endeavour to illustrate the necessity of it by mentioning cases, in which it will

appear to every one to be required. Before I do this, however, I must just observe, that some actions, and particular causes of action, have a determinate meaning as well as words, and that an individual is no more at liberty to give a private meaning to one than to the other. He that should attempt to use words in a different sense from that in which they are commonly employed, without giving notice of his intentions, would be said to be guilty of mental reservation and duplicity. Nor would *he* be deemed free from the charge, who should give to his actions a double meaning. This method of giving meaning to actions, as well as words, is of great use, since hereby much may be said, where nothing is uttered. Now, constant attendance at a particular place of religious worship, while every one is allowed to go to that which he prefers, is an action of the kind of which I am speaking, and is universally understood to imply a general approbation at least of the form of worship there used; nor can any one affix to it a different meaning, without exposing himself to the charge before mentioned.

When the worship of heathen deities was introduced among the children of Israel, it was certainly the duty of every believer in the true God to confine himself to the worship of Jehovah alone, if he wished to bear his testimony to the truth and propriety of this mode of worship. Had such a one never worshipped him at all, he might have been justly

suspected of indifference; and of something worse, if, instead of coming constantly to the temple of Jehovah, he had gone as regularly to the temple of Baal, and especially if he had joined in the cry, O Baal, hear us, and partaken of all the rites and ceremonies employed in the worship of that God. In vain would it have been for him to say; I mean nothing by this conduct, I follow the example and imitate the actions of the multitude; but my heart is secretly devoted to another being. A true Israelite would have replied: By attending in company with the sincere worshippers of Baal, you virtually declare your faith in the same God, and your persuasion of the propriety of worshipping him as they do. Had the same person attended alike the temple of Baal and the temple of Jehovah, and devoted an equal portion of his time to each, his conduct would then have been deemed equivocal. It would have been like a man affirming a thing at one time, and denying it at another; in which case his declarations would amount to nothing. Of such a worshipper, it must have been supposed, either that he halted between two opinions, without being able to determine whether Baal were God, or Jehovah were God, or (which would be more probable, as it would be impossible for the mind to remain long in suspense upon such a subject) that he believed neither in Jehovah nor in Baal, but frequented their temples with equal indifference for his own private ends, to obtain the good will of the worshippers of both;

which might be useful to him in the way of trade or preferment.

When the Christian religion was introduced, the obligation of every friend to truth to countenance it by his actions as well as by his words, by joining the society of Christians, and attending their public assemblies for divine worship, as well as by professing faith in Christ, was obvious and indisputable. But there were many Jews, who believed in Jesus, who were so timid, or so careful to preserve their rank and their good name, as to content themselves with being believers in private, without making any open professions. This was the conduct of many of the chief rulers who believed on him, but were afraid to confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue. Many heathen also, no doubt, discovered the like timidity or selfishness; but both lose all claim to the character of lovers of the truth.

When Christians began to deviate from the genuine principles of their religion by introducing the corruptions of popery, it was evidently the duty of the true professors of the Gospel, when every method of reason and remonstrance had failed, to withdraw from their society in order to condemn their errours, and to bear their own testimony in support of truth; and had they generally done so, those corruptions would have been effectually checked in the beginning; but being indifferent to truth, they were not willing to adopt a conduct, which would cost them some trouble, and might expose them to dan-

ger; and to that indifference we are indebted for the growth of those errours. When protestants became sensible of the numerous corruptions of the apostate church of Rome, they endeavoured to reform it by bringing it back to the standard of the New Testament; but finding their endeavours ineffectual, they withdrew from it's communion, in order to bear a decided and open testimony against it's errours; and in this instance they acted like sincere friends of truth. Had they continued with that church and complied with all it's rites and ceremonies, it might have been justly inferred that they approved of them. By withdrawing, they evidently expressed their disapprobation. If, however, when a separation had thus taken place, any persons had chosen to attend half their time with the protestants and half with the papists, the construction, which would have been naturally put upon such conduct, would have been, either that they were undetermined which to approve, if that were possible, or that they were equally indifferent to both, and that in fact they did not attend from any religious motive, but from worldly views.

The same reasoning is applicable to every other material corruption of the Christian religion, in whatever form it may appear, whether in doctrine or in discipline. Men cannot, consistently with that regard they owe to truth, countenance pernicious errours, although only by their silence; nor can they, consistently with that regard, give equal

countenance to truth and errour at the same time. A church founded upon the authority of human laws, and retaining many of the errours of the church of Rome, and one that is formed upon the authority of Christ alone and the simple discipline of the New Testament, cannot be subjects of approbation to the same persons; nor can they continue to countenance both, without incurring the imputation of an indifference to truth.

Thirdly, those show indifference to Christian truth, who take no active measures to propagate it in the world, or to defend it against those by whom it is attacked. This head may appear to coincide with the preceding; but it differs from it, in as much as what was there required was only an open profession of the truth, and here it is proposed that something more should be done. There are many who will give a silent testimony in favour of truth, but excuse themselves from any further exertions. These are, however, necessary, if we expect that it should ever prevail in the world. Truth has always stronger arguments in it's favour than errour. Were the friends of truth, therefore, to set them before the world in their true light, it could not fail to triumph in the end over it's antagonists. The contest must ever be unequal between truth and errour, where equal zeal and talents are employed on each side. But if the advocates of errour be active and zealous, while those of truth are indifferent, truth cannot long maintain it's ground.

However, to support truth in the way here required often exposes men to much odium and to every species of ill usage. Voluntarily to encounter these evils is more than the zeal of many is prepared for; who, therefore, shrink from their duty, and leave the cause without defence. The particular mode, which each individual ought to adopt for defending and propagating the truth, must depend upon his circumstances. Some are best able to do this by writing in it's defence, some by their eloquence in speaking, and others by supporting and encouraging those who are thus engaged; and every man has it in his power to contribute something to this purpose, which if he neglect to do, he is chargeable with indifference.

The apostles of Christ were illustrious examples of that zeal for the truth, which I am here recommending. They travelled to every part of the known world in order to communicate the knowledge of the Gospel of truth, and encountered every species of hardship in accomplishing this important work. Had it not been for their exertions, Christianity would not have spread so widely as it did. When errours arose in the different churches which they established, they immediately wrote letters to them to correct their mistakes. Thus Paul, when the Jews attempted to impose the yoke of their law upon the neck of the Gentiles, wrote several epistles to guard Christians against this corruption of the Gospel, and to assure them, that they were entitled

to the privileges of the Christian church by faith in Christ, without being circumcised. This was the ground of the enmity of his countrymen against him, and caused him at length to be sent a prisoner to Rome, where he suffered death. The apostle John manifested a like zeal against those, who in his time maintained, that Jesus suffered only in appearance and not in reality. The efforts of both were successful. These controversies, which so much agitated the Christian church in early times, have long been laid asleep; and had other Christians in following ages imitated the example of these apostles, the Christian world would not have been overrun with errour.

Some persons, indeed, too much shocked at the comparatively light evils, which have arisen from this degree of zeal for the truth, have called *the rage of proselytism, the curse of the world*; but when I look at the religion of the heathens, which is a corruption partly of natural and partly of revealed religion; when I look at the church of Rome, a corruption of the simple religion of Jesus, and consider the causes from which these numerous evils have arisen, I am disposed to reverse the maxim, and to say, that an indifference to truth has been the curse of the world, and that, while it continues, genuine Christianity, and (what is necessarily connected with it) the perfection and happiness of the human race, never can prevail.

The subject we have been considering I thought

not unsuitable to an occasion, on which we commemorate the death of that illustrious personage, who declared, that it was the great object of his mission to bear witness to the truth, who published it to the world without reserve and without fear, and who at last laid down his life in it's defence. The benefits we derive from his services and sufferings are great beyond calculation; and though other truths may not be of equal value with those which he hereby established, yet all truths deserve our attention in proportion to their importance.

SERMON XXV.

CHRISTIANS THE SALT OF THE EARTH.

MATT. V, 13.

Ye are the Salt of the Earth: but if the Salt have lost it's Savour, wherewith shall it be salted? (wherewith shall it be seasoned?) It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under Foot of Men.

FROM the use of salt in preserving food from putrefaction, Christ illustrates in this passage the design of Providence in furnishing Christians with superiour religious knowledge, which was to check the progress of corruption in the world. For, as salt preserves meat in a wholesome state, and makes it grateful to the palate, so Christians are qualified to preserve or restore purity of morals among mankind, and to keep the world in a useful and acceptable state. Whence it follows, that it is the duty of Christians to endeavour to answer this purpose of the divine Being by the means with which he has furnished them, remembering, that, if they do not comply with his wishes, they must expect to be treated with the same contempt as insipid salt.

Hence I shall take occasion to show,

I. How Christians are qualified to produce the effect here ascribed to them; and

II. Employ some considerations to induce them to exert their powers to answer this useful purpose.

Were they to think and act in every respect like the men with whom they are surrounded, such a benefit as that of which we are speaking could not be expected from them; but if we can show, that their principles and conduct are opposite to those of the world, we may then suppose, that they will have some influence in restraining them.

What we have now, therefore, to inquire is; wherein do the principles of Christians differ from those maintained by other men? From the intercourse of two bodies of people which are each of them in a like state of putrefaction, we can expect nothing but an increase of the putridity of both; but where the qualities of the one are totally opposite to those of the other, the tendency to grow worse may be corrected.

The character here given of Christians was delivered many ages ago. To ascertain the truth of it, therefore, it is necessary to examine, what they believed, and how they acted, at that time. We shall afterward consider, how far the same description is applicable to those, who bear the same name at the present day.

Christians were then taught to believe, as the

Jews were before them; that there was but one God, the creator of the world, infinite in all his perfections, the benevolent governor of the world, and the kind father of all mankind. In this respect they differed from the heathen who believed in many Gods, and attributed to their deities all the passions and vices of men. They likewise differed from many modern Christians, who have associated with him two other beings of equal powers, and by dividing have lessened the dignity and authority of the Supreme.

They were taught to regard the perfections of this being as the object of their imitation, and as the only foundation of their hopes; and that, although his perfections were to be celebrated and his favours acknowledged both in private retirement and in the society of their brethren, yet that such services were of no value in his estimation, unless accompanied with the affections of the heart, and with a strict regard to the duties which men owe to one another. In this respect they differed from the Scribes and Pharisees, the teachers of religion among the Jews, who, while they were strict in enjoining the observance of ceremonies, paid no attention to the cultivation of the heart, or to the duties of justice, mercy, or fidelity, but had grossly corrupted the law of God in respect to all these virtues.

Few of the heathen had any hope of a future state of existence after death; and where they entertained this expectation, the ideas they had formed of it's pleasures and punishments were too mean and

gross to have any influence in recommending virtue or deterring from the practice of vice. It is allowed, indeed, that the Jews in the time of our Saviour expected a resurrection from the dead, although it formed no article in the revelation made to Moses. Their conceptions of a future life were, however, very gross, as well as those of the heathens; and they limited the benefits of it to the seed of Abraham. But Christians are instructed to believe, that there will be a resurrection of all mankind, of the Jew and of the Gentile, of the just and the unjust, and that each will receive retributions exactly proportioned to their characters, the one being rewarded with substantial and everlasting happiness, the other punished with unspeakable misery.

The Jews limited the favour of the divine Being to their own nation, or at least to such only as conformed to their laws; but Christians maintain a more liberal and conciliating doctrine, viz. that all his offspring without exception are alike the objects of his affection, and that nothing is necessary to recommend men to his favour, but sincere contrition for their offences and reformation of conduct, or fearing God and working righteousness.

From the master, who taught these just notions of God, their duty, and future expectations, they have also learnt, that it is incumbent upon them to publish the knowledge they have acquired to the world, and to take every opportunity of impressing it upon the minds of others; that to conceal it within their

own breasts, or to be afraid to acknowledge their relation to their divinely authorised teacher, from the dread of any kind of suffering, is an instance of criminal timidity and weakness, which will be punished with the greatest severity, Christ having said, that he shall be ashamed of those before God, who have been ashamed of him before men. From the same authority they have also learnt, that, as they are not to embrace the principles, so they are not to follow the example of other men, but to observe the law of Christ, however contrary it may be to the practice of the world, and however inconsistent with their temporal interest. This was the language and the doctrine of Jesus to his followers; but the maxim, which heathen philosophers held out to their disciples, was, " think with the wise, but act with the vulgar,"—conform outwardly to the religion of your country, however contemptible it may appear in your eyes, and never expose yourselves to suffering for the sake of your opinions.

The consequence of believing the principles before mentioned to be true and of divine origin must be, that Christians would no longer regard it as the chief object of life to indulge their appetites, to acquire fame or wealth, but to form a virtuous and pious character, as the only sure means of true enjoyment, of qualifying themselves for the divine favour and for future happiness. Believing the supreme importance of those views of religion which the Gospel communicates, they would inculcate them with

the utmost care upon their children and dependents, and upon all who were within the reach of their influence. The errours, into which Jews or heathens had unhappily fallen, they would labour to correct by pointing out their mistakes. From the temples of idols and the synagogues of Jews they would withdraw themselves, thus bearing a silent but public testimony against the errours of those who assembled there; and employ every other innocent method to discountenance mistaken notions or a false worship.

As they had been solemnly warned, that an everlasting existence of happiness depended upon their steady adherence to the Gospel of Christ, they would be ready to profess it at all hazards, although threatened with the loss of property, liberty, and even life, looking for the recompense of their sacrifices in Heaven.

While they were conscious that they had violated any of the rules of morality laid down in the Gospel, they would be careful to express their sorrow for the offence, and to alter their conduct, knowing that one vicious indulgence wilfully persisted in would expose them to final condemnation. Where they observed those rules to be violated by others, they would not fail to express their disapprobation, either by admonishing the offender of his fault, or by withdrawing from his company, or by doing both where they were likely to produce a good effect.

Such may we suppose would be the natural effect of a practical faith in the Gospel. And is it conceivable that a number of men, who believed these principles and acted in this manner, and professed to do so by the authority of God, should produce no change in the world? should do nothing to correct the errours and restrain the vices of mankind? Can it be supposed, that the foolish superstitions and abominable practices of the idolaters could be compared with the pure worship of the Gospel, or the affected piety and pharisaic pride of the Jew with the honest and humble character of the Christian, without suffering on the comparison? or that truth, justice, benevolence, and fidelity, had nothing in them which could excite respect and lead to imitation? To suppose this would be to suppose, that truth has no advantage in contending with errour; that virtue has no charms; that conscience has lost it's power, example it's influence; and that shame and remorse are banished from the world. Happily for mankind, we know the contrary to have been the fact; and with the same certainty we therefore know, that the belief of Christianity by great numbers must have produced a good effect upon the morals of mankind.

Such appears to be it's natural tendency; and this we know, both from sacred and profane history, to have been the effect actually produced by the Christian religion in the first ages of the church. The acts of the apostles, and their letters or epistles,

addressed principally to different churches which they established, bear ample testimony to their courage in professing the Gospel, their zeal in propagating it in the face of the most violent opposition, and to the happy fruits of their labours, not only in making many proselytes, but likewise in producing important changes in their conduct. Some indeed only tremble for a season, like the Roman governor, when they heard them reason of justice, temperance, and a judgment to come, and afterward returned again to their evil practices; but upon others the preaching of the apostles produced a more permanent effect, occasioning genuine repentance for their past sins, and universal reformation of character. The great mass of the Jewish people was every where so far advanced in depravity, as to be incapable of being corrected by the powerful discipline of the Gospel, and was at length devoted to that destruction which it had justly merited by it's sins. Many thousands of Jews, however, believed, and became thereby virtuous and excellent characters. But in the heathen world the Christian religion found a more favourable and produced a more extensive effect, leading gentiles to abandon the worship of their idols, and to live soberly, righteously, and piously, and hereby saving them from those calamities to which as idolaters they were doomed. Their enemies themselves bore testimony to the innocence of the lives of Christian converts, in consequence of their profession of Christianity, as

well as to the general desertion of the heathen temples. These were the salutary fruits produced by Christians in the first ages, while their faith retained it's original purity. But the religion of Jesus, like the religion of nature and the law of Moses, soon began to be corrupted, and hereby lost it's efficacy. Instead of restraining vice, and checking the tendency of mankind toward a corruption of morals, it hastened their progress therein; instead of exalting, it degraded the divine Being in the ideas of men, bringing them back to the worship of idols, and of frail men and women under the character of saints, and leading them to substitute innumerable ceremonies in the place of substantial virtue.

Of such Christians Christ would not say, "ye are the salt of the earth, ye are the instruments employed by Providence for correcting the moral disorders of the world, and for saving it from destruction;" but, on the contrary, he would rather be inclined to say, "ye are the corrupters of the world, the bane of true religion, the tares among the wheat. Let all beware how they admit you; for you carry with you the seeds of mischief whithersoever you go."

Those only would now deserve, in his estimation, to be called the salt of the earth, who had thrown off the errours of popery, discovered the sense of Scripture, and recovered the genuine doctrine of the new covenant; for such only would appear to him to be qualified to restore strict purity of morals, and hereby to reclaim and reform the world. This dog-

trine has no doubt the same tendency *now*, which it had originally; for human nature is still the same, and will produce the same fruits, when cultivated by the same means.

If any should ask, in what manner Christians must act to become the salt of the earth; I answer, by acting as the first Christians acted in like circumstances; not by standing aloof from the world, and burying themselves in caves and cloisters, as many have done in later times. As well might we expect salt to preserve the putrifying body, although kept at a distance, as look for the reformation of the world from such men. To produce this object, they must have some intercourse, and come into contact with the body they are to preserve, in those useful and active employments of life to which they may be called. Nor is this change to be accomplished by those whose maxim it is to do as the world does, and who swim with the stream; for such men, instead of reforming the world, cannot fail to be corrupted by it; they assimilate themselves to those manners which they ought to oppose.

It is to be effected by professing the truth on all occasions with fearless integrity; by taking every opportunity of communicating it to others, and of exposing errour; by condemning the vices of the age, by whomsoever practised; by reproving and admonishing those who are guilty of them, and, where they appear incorrigible, withdrawing from their society; by being particularly attentive to the

purity and propriety of their own conduct. By such means, by a right faith and an upright practice, where there is fixed in the mind a just standard of right, and where it is rigidly adhered to in opposition to the practices and opinions of others, the world may yet be reclaimed and saved from impending ruin.

Those, who are thus engaged, may be but few; yet their influence will be powerful and extensive, and they may expect that their numbers will gradually increase. For there is a secret charm in genuine Christian virtue (undebased with the gloom of superstition and the moroseness of the recluse) in which benevolence is the predominant feature, which attracts the affection of beholders. It draws other men after it, and induces them to desert the standard of the enemy, or at least, by inspiring them with awe, prevents them from proceeding to those excesses, in which they would otherwise indulge themselves. The effect may not be immediately visible; but it is not the less certain. It operates in silence like the salt in the meat or the leaven in the mass, until the whole is salted, or leavened.

Having now shown, how Christians of the first ages were qualified to produce the effect ascribed to them in the text, and that Christians of our own times are capable of doing the same good, nothing now remains, but to exhort you in the second place to exert the powers, with which you are furnished, for this purpose. If you be, what I hope and be-

lieve you are already, well inclined, many words will not be wanted. For nothing more is necessary to excite a good man to pursue a particular course of conduct, than to show him, that he may do good thereby.

I have now shown you the relation in which you stand to the world by professing a purer faith than your brethren, and the important change you are capable of producing in society. Let me now intreat you to labour to accomplish it effectually. This depends much upon yourselves; for, although faith operates naturally and necessarily upon the mind, yet it's operations are greatly aided and accelerated by our own voluntary exertions, by the degree of attention we pay to our principles, and the care and frequency with which we reflect upon them. If therefore you wish to do much good to others by the profession and practice of the truth, take care that it be well understood and diligently practised by yourselves. Examine the grounds of your faith, and let your conduct in every instance correspond with your principles. For in vain is it, that we attempt to reform the world with erroneous principles or a defective example. Ever keep in remembrance, that you are not to receive an example from other men, but to give one to them; that you are not to be guided by others, but to be a rule to yourself; and that there is no surer mark of unfitness for the office for which you are designed, than an intire conformity to the practices of those, who have corrupted genuine

Christianity. In your intercourse with the world be not ashamed to avow your principles, or to defend them on every proper occasion; since in this way only can they be known or procure attention. In every society into which you are brought, in every connection in which you are placed, endeavour to sow the principles of Christian piety and virtue, and to recommend them by a suitable behaviour.

This conduct you are bound to pursue by a principle of gratitude to God, who has favoured you with superiour knowledge for this purpose, and to whom this will be the most acceptable return you can make; by a principle of benevolence to mankind, whose hopes of an approved state of society depend entirely upon your exertions; and I will add (if more generous motives have no influence), by a regard to your own honour and interest.

You now hold the most conspicuous and desirable situation among mankind; you possess the only distinction which is of real value, the power of doing more good than your brethren. But, if the world be not purified and improved by your doctrine and example, you will incur the disgrace of having enjoyed a talent, which you know not how to use, of having possessed advantages, which you had not wisdom to turn to your own account; an instance of folly and weakness, which cannot fail to degrade you in your own eyes, and, what is of more consequence, in the estimation of him, whose judgment is to decide your final condition.

By conforming to the world you may hope to rise into favour with your brethren, whose vanity may be flattered by your compliances, and who will be disposed to reward them by marks of their regard; but let it be remembered, that in proportion as you rise in the esteem of mankind by these means, you sink in the estimation of God, and that he will regard such conformity to the world in the same contemptuous light, in which men view salt which has lost it's savour, is become insipid, is wholly unfit for the purposes it was designed to answer, and is for that reason cast out and trodden under foot of men.

SERMON XXVI.

ON THE PHRASEOLOGY OF THE EPISTLES.

1 COR. ii, 12, 13

Now we have received, not the Spirit of the World, but the Spirit which is of God; that we might know the Things that are freely given us of God: which Things also we speak, not in the Words which Man's Wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth, comparing Spiritual Things with Spiritual.

THE general meaning of these verses is this; the apostle asserts, that the words he employed to express the privileges of Christians under the Gospel, were not taken from the terms used in the common intercourse of life, or in the discourses of philosophers, but from what had already been employed by God for a like purpose respecting the Jews, and that both in the application of the terms, and in adopting the ideas they were intended to represent, he had been guided, not by a worldly, but by a spiritual mind. In order to show the propriety of this conduct, I shall consider what the language of God respecting the Jews has been, and then on what grounds it may be applied to Christians.

The children of Israel, who were the descendants

of Abraham, were selected from the rest of mankind for obtaining a particular purpose in the plan of divine Providence, for preserving in the world the worship of Jehovah and the knowledge of true religion, while surrounding nations, as it was foreseen would be the case, were sunk into idolatry and ignorance. In conformity to this design, they were favoured with particular advantages of a religious nature, not enjoyed by the rest of the world. The deity himself by the mouth of Moses, or by speaking to them in person, gave them instructions respecting his nature and government, the worship that was to be paid to him, and the duties which they owed to him and to one another. They had a system of civil laws delivered to them, which was to regulate their conduct toward one another and toward neighbouring nations, which, if not a model of perfection, was extremely well adapted to that state of civilization and improvement, which this people had attained. In cases, for which these laws did not provide, Jehovah was ready, upon being applied to, to give them direction how to act; and where they wanted instruction, consolation, or reproof, he raised up extraordinary persons in the character of prophets, who were sent to them with divine authority for this purpose, working miracles and predicting future events. A particular country was allotted for their residence, in which they were to prosper and be happy, as long as they observed the laws which God had given them, and in which

they were to be afflicted and oppressed, or from which they were to be banished, when those laws were transgressed. This is a brief outline of the mosaic institution; from which it appears, that it was a great favour to the children of Israel as well as an important benefit to the world.

As God had selected the children of Israel from other nations to bestow upon them these peculiar privileges and advantages, they are said to be *chosen* and *elected*, and God is said to choose them. Thus Moses tells the children of Israel in his last address to them; "the Lord had a delight in thy fathers, and he chose their seed after them, even you before all people." In a prophecy foretelling, three hundred years before the event, the birth of Cyrus by name, who was to deliver the children of Israel from their captivity in Babylon, God thus addresses him by the prophet Isaiah; "for Jacob my servant's sake and Israel mine elect I have even called thee by thy name." As the children of Israel had been invited by several express messages from God to accept of the honours intended for them, he is said to *call* them, and they to be *his called*; "When Israel was a child, then I loved him and called my son out of Egypt." "Hearken unto me, O Jacob," says the prophet Isaiah, "and Israel my *called*."

Had the children of Israel been left in Egypt, they would soon have adopted the idolatrous notions and customs of the people among whom they lived,

and have been involved in the dreadful consequences of idolatry, the loss of the divine favour, and the being subject to severe judgments: they would have been ruined, as the Canaanites and other nations afterward were. But by being called out of Egypt, and placed by themselves in a separate country, under the laws which God had given them, and under his immediate direction, they were saved from these evils. Hence they are said to be *saved* and *delivered;* and, as this salvation or deliverance was not accomplished without the performance of many miracles and much trouble, they are said to be *bought, purchased,* and *redeemed,* as if a sum of money had been expended for their emancipation. David expresses his own admiration of the divine goodness to them in this instance, as well, no doubt, as that of other pious Israelites, when he says; "and what one nation in the earth is like thy people, even like Israel, whom God went to redeem for a people to himself, and to make him a name, and to do for you great things and terrible, for thy land, before thy people, which thou redeemedst to thee from Egypt, from the nations and their Gods."

As God gave the Jews their civil and ecclesiastical constitution of government, by which they acquired their existence as a national body, he is said to *create* and *form* them. Accordingly the prophet Isaiah addresses them; "Thus saith the Lord, that *created* thee, O Jacob! and he that *formed* thee, O Israel!" where he refers, not to the giving

them being as individuals, but to the giving them existence as a separate body of people. Before that period they had no being and were not a people, and the gentile nations, who were not so formed, are actually described in this language, although they had, no doubt, a civil and ecclesiastical constitution of government. Thus God tells the Jews, "I will move them to jealousy with those, who are *not* a people;" and in another place, "I will say to them, who are *not* my people, thou *art* my people."

In near correspondence with the idea of creation is another term frequently used to express the peculiar relation of God to the Jews, which is that of *begetting* them; and accordingly he is called their *father*, and they are said to be *his sons* and *daughters*, his children. Being descended from one father, they are the children of God and brethren with respect to one another; they are also called *his house* or *family*.

"Of the rock that *begat* thee," says Moses, "thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that *formed* thee. Do ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish people? Is he not thy *father*, that hath *bought* thee?" Of Moses God gives this character, "that he was faithful in all his *house*," meaning, that he was faithful in the whole *house* or *family* of Israel.

As the children of Israel were honoured with the presence of God among them, and devoted more immediately to his service, they are represented as *sanctified* hereby, and are called *saints* and *holy*.

Thus Moses is directed by God in the mountain to go and tell the people, "that they should be to him a *holy* nation;" and Solomon at the consecration of the temple prays, "let thy priests, O Lord God, be clothed with salvation, and let thy *saints* rejoice in goodness;" where the word *saints* is put for the children of Israel in general, without any reference to their moral character. The same thing is still more evident in the following passage in the Psalms; "he also exalteth the horn of his people, the praises of his *saints*, even of the children of Israel;" where the phrase, "children of Israel," explains what is meant by the word "*saints*."

Since the whole body of the Jews as such were *saints*, and *holy*, the Gentiles, who did not belong to their community, were of course *sinners* and *unclean*. This is evident from the language of Christ himself, who in one place declares, that he shall be delivered to the *gentiles*, and in another place, when speaking of the same event, that he should be delivered into the hands of *sinners*. It is but proceeding one step further to call those who were *sinners* and *unholy*, *the enemies of God*, as they are described in several passages of the book of Psalms. Thus God is addressed by the author of the seventy-fourth Psalm, "*thine enemies*," meaning the *heathen*, "roar in the midst of thy congregation," *i. e.* in the midst of the children of Israel.

There are two circumstances respecting these terms or phrases, which deserve notice. The first

is, that they are not intended to express the moral character of those to whom they are applied, but merely a state of privilege and favour, or a want of these advantages. Thus, when some are called *holy*, *saints*, *the children of God*, and *the sons of God*, we are not to understand by these terms *good* men, but such only as were members of the Jewish polity; and in consequence of this the *adopted* children of God, and in a state of favour with him; nor, on the other hand, when others are called *unclean*, *sinners*, *aliens*, and *enemies*, are we to understand hereby men of bad character, but merely such as, being given to the practice of idolatry, were cast out of the divine favour. That the terms are not to be so understood is evident hence, that they are applied without exception to whole bodies of men: the whole Jewish nation are called *saints*, and denominated *holy*, and the whole gentile world *sinners*, and *enemies*; which, if understood of their moral characters, can in neither case be true; for it is too much to say of any large body of men, that they are all virtuous and good, or all vicious and wicked.

The second circumstance to be observed is, that these terms are employed by God himself, or by divinely authorised teachers acting in his name, by Moses and the other prophets of the Old Testament. It may, therefore, be justly said of them, as the apostle does in the text, that they are such as the Holy Ghost, or the Holy Spirit, teacheth a man to use.

Having now considered what were the peculiar circumstances of the Jews in respect to the divine Being, and the terms used to express them, I come, in the second place, to consider on what ground they can be applied to Christians.

It must be remembered, then, that the circumstances of the first Christians, when converted to Christianity, bore a considerable resemblance to those of the children of Israel when rescued from Egypt, and placed under the Mosaic institution; for the Gentiles were sunk into idolatry, and into a total ignorance of religion; nor was there a prospect of any remedy for these evils. When, therefore, they were recovered from this state by the preaching and miracles of Jesus Christ and his apostles, they might, with much propriety, be said to be *saved, delivered, bought, purchased,* and *redeemed,* in the senses in which these terms had been applied before to the recovery of Israel from the gods, as well as the bondage of Egypt. Gentiles were now placed under a new constitution of things; they had new laws for the regulation of their conduct, new hopes and fears to animate their obedience. Their situation is as much superiour to what it was before, as life is superiour to a state of insensibility, and the body of a living man to that of a dead one. They may, therefore, be said to be *created* and *made.* The being who brings them into this new state, may be said to *beget* them and to be their *father,* and they to be his *sons* and *daughters,* his *children* and *family.*

As they were brought out of this state, not by any efforts or application of their own, but in consequence of the messages which were sent them by God in the persons of the apostles, they may be said to be *invited* and *called*, as the children of Israel were. As there were many nations to whom the gospel was not sent, and many, to whom it was preached, rejected it, those who enjoyed the favour of divine revelation, and whose hearts were inclined to embrace it, may be said to be *chosen* or *elected*, and hence called his *elect*. Having been once enemies by the practice of idolatry, by renouncing it and professing Christianity, they may be said to be *reconciled* and brought into the state of friends.—The Jews became *sanctified* by the presence of God among them in the tabernacle and temple, and by the prophets. When the Gentiles, therefore, were favoured with the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit, communicated by the laying on of the hands of the apostles, they might be regarded as *sanctified* likewise, and as much entitled to the appellation of *saints* as the children of Israel could be. The great similarity, then, between the circumstances of the converted Gentiles, and those of the descendants of Abraham under Moses and the prophets, would naturally lead the apostles to consider them as holding the same relation to the divine Being as their ancestors had held, and to apply to them the same terms and phrases. And in regard to their countrymen the Jews, if, by the corruption of their law,

and the traditions of the elders, they had cast themselves out of the divine favour, and reduced themselves to a condition little superiour to that of idolatrous Gentiles, or that of their fathers in Egypt, the Gospel was as great a favour to the one as to the other, and both might be represented by the same strong terms. The circumstances, then, both of converted Jews and converted Gentiles, bore so near a resemblance to those of the children of Israel, in the early period of their history, as fully to justify the application of the same terms to the former as to the latter.

Let us now see, whether this resemblance was observed by the first teachers of Christianity, and whether they adopted the language, which we have shown to be fully authorized. We have seen why the Jews were said to be *chosen* and *elected* of God: similar reasons induced the apostles to represent the Gentiles as now *elected* to partake of the same privileges once enjoyed by the Jews. The apostle Paul says; "who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect?" meaning thereby *Gentiles converted* to the Christian faith. The same apostle tells Timothy, "that he endures all things for the elect's sake." Peter addresses his epistle "to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, *elect* according to the foreknowledge of God."

We have seen the term *saved* applied to the deliverance of the Jews from Egypt, and to their con-

version from the worship of false Gods to that of Jehovah. The same form is applied in a similar manner to the conversion of Gentiles to the profession of the Christian doctrine. Thus Paul says to the Corinthians, that "the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness, but unto us which are *saved*," *i. e.* recovered from heathenism, "it is the power of God;" to the Ephesians, that "it is by grace that they are *saved* through faith," *i. e.* by the favour of God and the exercise of faith in Christ they have been recovered from the state of idolaters. Of the Jews he complains to the Thessalonians, that they forbade him to speak to the Gentiles, that they might be *saved*, or converted. That in these passages the apostle speaks of a recovery from heathenism, and not of deliverance from the punishments threatened to the wicked in a future life, or final salvation, is evident from this circumstance, that he represents the salvation of which he speaks as already accomplished, they *are now saved*, as in the passage above quoted, and in that which follows, "*who hath saved us*, and *called* us with a holy calling, according to his own purpose and grace." The same thing may likewise be proved from the following text, where the apostle is speaking of God, "who," he says, "will have all men to be *saved*," *i. e.* recovered from Judaism and idolatry to the belief of the Gospel; for it is immediately added, "and to come to the knowledge of the truth," *be-*

ing saved and *coming to the knowledge of the truth*, being it seems the same thing.

It were easy to show, that the term *called* is applied in a similar sense, both to the children of Israel and to converted Gentiles, and that it signifies no more than being invited to enjoy certain external privileges, and not any irresistible impulse upon the mind, as some have supposed.

The Jews were *created*, we have seen, when they were formed into a national body under the Mosaic institution; and Christians are also *created*, when they are brought into subjection to the law of Christ. Paul speaks of some, who had "*put on the new man*, or the Christian state, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him." Of the Christian Jews he says, including himself in the number, "of his own will *begat* he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his *creatures*," *i. e.* of those who profess the Gospel. The language of the apostle James is similar: "of his own will *begat* he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his *creatures*."

As God is said in this and other passages to beget Christians by bringing them to the profession of the Gospel, as he was said to beget the Israelites by bringing them under the law of Moses, he must of course be represented as their *father*, and they his *children*, his *sons* and *daughters*, born to him. Thus Paul says, "we are all" (referring to Jews and Gen-

tiles) " the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." " Beloved," says the apostle John, " what manner of love the father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." And the apostle Peter represents the converts to whom he wrote, as " being born again (or regenerated), not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which lives and abides for ever;" where the phrase, *born again*, signifies, not a renovation of moral character, but a change of external profession, or a transition from idolatry or Judaism to the belief of the Gospel.

On account of this change likewise, Gentiles, who were once strangers and foreigners, are now *fellow citizens with the saints;* they are no longer *enemies* as they were in their gentile state, but they are at peace with God, they are reconciled to him and become his subjects and servants.

While the Gentiles were in a state of idolatry, they were regarded as *unclean;* but by embracing the Gospel they are *washed* and *sanctified*, rendered *holy*, and become *saints*. Paul exhorts the Colossians to put on, as the *elect* of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercy. The Thessalonians he charges, that his epistle should be read to all the *holy* brethren, *i. e.* to all the believers in Christ. The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews thus addresses his believing countrymen; " Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling"—and Peter tells them, that " they are a *chosen* generation, a royal

priesthood, a *holy* nation." Luke, the writer of the book of Acts, tells us, "that as Peter passed through all quarters, he came down also to the *saints* which dwelt in Lydda," *i. e.* to the Christians who lived in that place, and not to men, who on account of the excellence of their moral characters had deserved to be so denominated. Paul's usual method of addressing his epistles is, to the *saints* who dwelt in different places, that is, to the believers in those places.

Other examples of the same kind might easily be produced; but these are sufficient to show what we have been attempting to prove, viz. that the same terms and phrases, which were once applied by God himself and by divine messengers to the children of Israel under the institution of the law, are applied by the apostles to all Christians under the institution of the Gospel. And to this the apostle Paul refers in the text, when speaking of the privileges of Christians, or, according to his language, of the things, which are freely given to them of God, he says, "which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth," *(i. e.* not in the philosophical language of human art, or in such words as occur in the common intercourse of life) "but which the Holy Ghost teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual," or the spiritual privileges of Christians with the spiritual privileges of Israelites.

I shall now conclude with one or two remarks.

I. We see from what has been now said, that seve-

ral words are used by the apostles in a double sense, or that they have two significations. Thus the term *saved* sometimes signifies deliverance from future punishment, as when the apostle James says, a man is not saved by faith alone without works, and sometimes it signifies no more than recovery from idolatry by professing the Christian religion, as in the passages already quoted, and in the following, "not by the works of righteousness we have done, but according to his mercy he *saved* us." In like manner *holiness* sometimes signifies moral excellence, as when it is said, "without holiness no man shall see the Lord;" at other times it expresses no more than a privileged state in consequence of receiving a divine revelation, as when a whole body of Christians, among whom there must, no doubt, have been some bad men, are addressed as *holy brethren*. So the word *sinners* is sometimes to be understood of persons of immoral character, at other times it means the Gentiles as such, and is applied to the whole body without exception, although no doubt there were some persons of virtuous character even among them. But although these words have different significations when they occur in different places, it is easy in general to ascertain the sense in which they are to be taken, from the connection, and from the design and scope of the writer.

II. This mode of interpreting the language of the New Testament from that of the Old is authorized by an apostle, who tells us, that he had adopted

that language, and it furnishes us with the best means of understanding the apostolic writings. It was first suggested in modern times by one of the greatest philosophers whom this or perhaps any other country has produced—Mr. Locke, in his paraprase upon the Epistles. It was afterwards illustrated and confirmed by Dr. Taylor in his excellent Key to the apostolic writings, prefixed to his Paraphrase upon the Romans, and has since been adopted by the most learned and judicious commentators upon the Scriptures. But it is supported by a stronger recommendation than that of these names, by the declaration of the apostle himself, and by being absolutely necessary to understand his epistles, and to give them a rational and consistent meaning. Whoever attempts to explain them without admitting this interpretation, will find himself not only involved in inextricable mysteries, but likewise in many very pernicious errours. In consequence of this rule having not been attended to, and of the words of the apostle having been taken in a philosophical or common, and not in a scriptural sense, a system of religion has been introduced into the world, which is at variance with the rest of Scripture and with every principle of reason and justice.

Lastly, We see what is requisite to prepare us for reading the apostolic writings, particularly those of Paul: it is not a knowledge of the words, which man's wisdom teacheth, an acquaintance with the terms of art used in the schools of philosophy or ora-

tory, but with those, which the Holy Spirit teacheth, or the words employed by God to express the privileges of the children of Israel and his relation to them. To these words, then, let every one, who wishes for an acurate knowledge of the Christian system, direct his attention.

[THE seven following Discourses, though drawn up in the form of Sermons, were delivered as Lectures to a class of young men. The reader will perceive, that in various places the author has closely followed the Essays on the Death of Christ, &c., published by Dr. Priestley, under the name of Clemens, in the Theological Repository.]

SERMON XXVII.

ISAIAH i, 16, 18.

REPENTANCE AND REFORMATION ONLY REQUIRED IN ORDER TO ACCEPTANCE WITH GOD.

Wash ye, make you clean, put away the Evil of your doings from before mine Eyes, cease to do evil, learn to do well, seek Judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the Widow. Come now and let us reason together (or as it is better rendered, let us settle the Affair), saith the Lord: though your Sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as Snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as Wool.

THE great object of public religious instruction I conceive to be explaining the principles of revealed religion as contained in the Scriptures, in order that they may enlighten the understanding and direct the practice of the hearers. In doing this, the subjects which will most frequently come under consideration are those which are received in common by all Christians, because they are the most important. Nevertheless, where Christianity has been much corrupted, and reduced to a very different state from that, in which it came from the

hands of it's first author, it may sometimes become necessary to insist upon those things which few believe, or to oppose doctrines which are generally received. This service fidelity to the trust reposed in them, and a regard to the efficacy of religion, which depends upon it's purity, require from those who profess to teach it. And if it be necessary to plead any authority in a case, where their duty is so plain and obvious, they may mention the example of all reformers of religion in every period of time, and particularly that of the reformers from Popery, who, by continually exposing the errours of the church of Rome, brought them into disrepute. Nor can any other method be pointed out of delivering mankind from the errours, which protestants themselves have retained. To say of discourses on such subjects, that they are controversy, is by no means to declare them improper; for where doctrines embraced by fallible men, and evidently tending to weaken the obligations of morality, are declared to be essential to the nature of true religion, they deserve and ought to be controverted. Such I conceive to be the character of the doctrine, which I mean now to oppose, that of the atonement of Christ, and to the consideration of which I shall therefore proceed without further introduction.

It supposes, then, that there is an infinite evil in sin, and that nothing short of an infinite satisfaction could induce the divine Being to pardon it; that Christ, who was at the same time perfect God and

perfect man, offered this satisfaction by his obedience and death, discharging hereby, according to them, the debts of sinners, and making a proper, real, and full satisfaction to his father's justice. To make this atonement was, in their opinion, the great object for which Christ assumed flesh, appeared in the world, suffered, and died.

This doctrine is intimately connected with that of the Trinity; since no sufferings but those of a person, who is at the same time God and man, are supposed to have sufficient merit to make satisfaction to divine justice. Accordingly we find, that most persons, who have given up the divinity of Christ, have been ready to abandon that of his atonement also; yet as it is supposed to be clearly taught in Scripture, as great stress is laid upon it in the system of our opponents, and important consequences are derived from it, affecting our ideas of the moral government of God and our own moral character, it deserves to be thoroughly considered. The Catechism, drawn up by the assembly of divines at Westminster, declares, that the guilt of sin can be expiated only by the blood of Christ; and that justifying faith is that, whereby a sinner being convinced of his sin and misery, and of the disability in himself and all other creatures to recover him out of his lost condition, not only assenteth to the truth of the Gospel, but receiveth and resteth upon Christ and his righteousness, therein held forth, for pardon of sin and for the acceptance of

his person righteous before God: so that, according to this system of faith, not only is the atonement of Christ necessary to the salvation of every sinner, but the belief of and reliance upon that atonement; for without this reliance, or, as it is here called, resting upon the righteousness of Christ, there can be no saving faith. A doctrine, which is thus deliberately pronounced to be indispensably necessary to the eternal salvation of sinners, deserves to be carefully investigated by every one, lest, by taking up a false opinion, he should unhappily expose himself to irretrievable ruin. No one, however, need be alarmed at such declarations, if they be not founded in truth, any more than at the bold asseverations of the Papists against Protestants, who tell them that they will be eternally lost, because they do not believe their favourite doctrine of transubstantiation.

There are several modifications of the opinion we are about to consider, different from what has been just stated, to which the name of the doctrine of the atonement has been given by persons, who wish to avoid some of the objections to which it is liable, and to preserve a character for what is called orthodoxy, while they have no just claim to it; but that which I have mentioned is the genuine doctrine; for I have borrowed the language from the best standard of Calvinism in this country, the confession of faith, the larger and less catechisms of the divines assembled at Westminster; and it is against this that my arguments will be directed. While I direct

my principal attention to that subject, I may perhaps take occasion to notice these explanations, and to show how far they deviate from the original idea, and from the language of Scripture.

In pursuance of the plan which I propose to myself, I shall consider, first, on what terms God is represented in Scripture as pardoning sinners; secondly, the design of the death of Christ; thirdly, how this design appears consistent with those various figures in which it is spoken of, and with the many virtues which are ascribed to it.

I am first, then, to consider on what terms God is represented in Scripture as pardoning sinners. Before I do this, I shall examine what the light of nature would teach us upon this subject, or what we should be able to collect from the appearance of things around us, respecting God's inclination to forgive sin.

Now the idea, which the contemplation of the works of nature leads us to form of their author, is that of a Being who is in the highest degree benevolent. We see happiness at present every where diffused among his creatures in an infinite variety of forms and degrees, and an evident tendency in the course of nature to produce a much larger portion of it to the human race. If there be some evil in the world, yet we generally see that it is productive of good, or that it prevents a much greater degree of evil, and therefore is upon the whole an advantage. From a view of the sufferings, then, as well

as of the enjoyments of mankind, we have reason to conclude, that the design of the divine Being, in making and governing the world, was to render them happy. If such a Being were to inflict punishment upon any of his creatures, we may naturally suppose, that he would have the communication of good in view, that is, in this case, the reformation of the offender, so as to prevent him from injuring himself or others by a repetition of the offence. Now an offender who repents of his conduct, who is sorry for what he has done, and is sincerely resolved that he will not do it again, is surely not a proper object of punishment; for the end of it with respect to him is already answered; there is a disposition to alter his conduct and to do well in future, which is all that could be attained by the severest treatment. To inflict evil in this case would be to do it when it is not likely to answer any useful purpose, and is unnecessary, which can proceed from nothing but resentment and revenge, dispositions which we ought, by no means, to attribute to a perfect Being, such as we know God to be.

We see, indeed, what are deemed the wisest and best of human governments, inflicting punishments upon offenders against the laws, without regarding professions of repentance for the past, or promises of future amendment; but this is obviously because they cannot be certain, that these professions and promises are sincere. Could they be assured of future good conduct, it would be perfectly consistent

with the design of government, which is the happiness of the whole community and that of every individual, so far as this latter does not interfere with the former, to grant free pardon and remit the punishment. This obstacle to pardon cannot occur under the government of God, to whom the hearts and the sincerity or insincerity of the professions of all men are perfectly known. Here there is room for pardon, where it could not safely be bestowed by men; and benevolence seems to require it in every instance, where the only rational design of punishment can be obtained without inflicting it, that is, wherever men are sincere penitents.

It must be acknowledged, however, that there are some appearances in nature, which seem to make against this conclusion, that God will freely pardon the penitent; for we find cases of intemperance, for instance, where men may be sincerely sorry for their past misconduct, and have entirely reformed their behaviour, who yet suffer the evil consequences of their former vices as long as they live, in a diseased constitution of body or a variety of complaints brought on by excess. Yet all that can be inferred from this is, not that there is no room for any degree of forgiveness, but that the remission is not complete, so as to exempt the offender from all the ill effects of his misconduct, which is probably true in every instance, even where the divine Being forgives most freely.

From the benevolent character of the divine Being,

as taught us by the light of nature; it seems probable, that he will pardon the penitent; but it may be thought doubtful upon that authority how far this pardon will extend. Let us next examine the language of revelation, where we may expect more decisive and satisfactory information upon this interesting subject.

If In endeavouring to deduce the character of the Deity from his works we find some difficulty, and our conclusions are attended with uncertainty; because we cannot fully comprehend his design in them. But, if the great author of nature should condescend to give us an account of himself, we must then see, that we should enjoy the best advantage for knowing him we could desire; for what can teach us what God is, so well as himself? A remarkable instance of this kind we have in the xxxivth Chapter of Exodus, 6th and 7th verses, where God, being about to write the Ten Commandments a second time upon two tables of stone for the children of Israel, after Moses had destroyed the first tables on the occasion of seeing the people worshipping the golden calf, thus describes himself: "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin." We see here, that to be inclined to forgive iniquity, transgression, and sin, is reckoned by the divine Being himself to be an essential attribute of his nature. It is not indeed here

said on what terms this forgiveness is bestowed; but from the circumstances in which the words were spoken, it is sufficiently evident what the terms are; for this proclamation was made just after the Israelites had put off their ornaments in token of their sorrow for the offence of the golden calf, and after they had renewed the acknowledgment of their allegiance to Jehovah by going without the camp to the tent, which Moses had pitched for those who were on the Lord's side, and every one had worshipped him, when he appeared in the cloudy pillar. God goes on to say of himself, according to our translation, and "that will by no means clear the guilty," which we understand of the impenitent guilty, but it should have been rendered, *and will by no means utterly destroy*, "visiting," or rather, *but only visiting* "the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation," that is, so great is the mercy of his nature, that, although he may be angry with those who offend him, and punish them, yet it shall not be to utter destruction, it shall only be to the third and fourth generation. The meaning of this language is illustrated by what Jeremiah xxx, 11, says to them in the name of the Lord; "though I make a full end of all nations whither I have scattered thee, yet will I not make a full end of thee; but I will correct thee in measure." Agreeably to this language we find, that, whenever the children of Israel were oppressed by their enemies in their

own country, or carried captive into a foreign land, if they cried unto the Lord and repented of their idolatry and wickedness, he heard their voice, forgave their sins, and received them to his favour again: so that in these instances, which are extremely numerous, we find that nothing was necessary to forgiveness but repentance. We read indeed a great deal in the books of Moses about making atonements, but this is a subject which we shall consider separately, when it will appear, that this did not signify making satisfaction to God for the sins of the people.

When David had been guilty of a heinous crime, he pleads for pardon on the ground of his having a contrite heart, as if no other consideration were necessary for forgiveness than repentance, Psalm li, 16, 17: "For thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." In the text the prophet in the name of God exhorts the Jews, who were at this time very corrupt, "to cease to do evil and to learn to do well," and assures them, that, upon complying with this exhortation, the deep stain of guilt, which they contracted in the sight of God, would be removed (which is here expressed in figurative language) by saying, that their sins, although as scarlet, should be white as snow, and although red like crimson, they should be as wool. But the same

prophet in still plainer language says, lv, 7, " let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Now if God could be induced to forgive sin only by a regard to the sufferings and merit of another person, and if reliance upon those merits were necessary for the pardon of every offender, it is very extraordinary, that God, in prescribing the very terms upon which forgiveness was to be bestowed, should never mention this duty. His silence upon so important a subject in such circumstances is an evident proof, that no such duty was required; for how is it reconcilable to common prudence and common equity, to say nothing of divine wisdom and goodness, that, when the conditions of pardon are held out, the most essential article should be omitted? Revelation, instead of being a benefit, would in that case become a snare to entrap men, by leading them to depend upon one means of reconciliation, where their view ought to be directed toward another. Again, if David and other good men mentioned in Scripture knew that God was induced to forgive sin in consideration of what Christ was to do and suffer, how comes it to pass, that they never plead these sufferings with God as an argument for forgiveness, which they must know to be the most powerful they could employ? Christians in the present day, who believe the modern doctrine of atonement, are ready

enough to press the belief of it, and to say, we beseech thee, O God, to pardon our sins for Christ's sake, for the sufferings and merit of thy only begotten son, with other expressions of a like nature; and so would the patriarchs of old have done, if they had known any thing of such a doctrine, but their silence proves to a demonstration, that they were unacquainted with it. There is one argument indeed, which was urged with great confidence in petitions for pardon under the former dispensation, but it is of a very different nature from that, which is here under consideration: it is founded, not upon what was to be done by another being to satisfy the demands of justice, but upon the mercy and goodness of the divine nature; Psalm xxv, 7, "Remember not the sins of my youth nor my transgressions; according to thy mercy remember thou me, for thy goodness' sake, O Lord." God is here intreated to pardon, not for the sake of Christ, but for his goodness' sake, that is, out of regard to his goodness, which naturally inclined him to forgive. In the same manner forgiveness is spoken of in other places as the distinguishing excellence of the divine nature, without any reference to any consideration, which inclined him to it; Psalm lxxxvi, 5; "Thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive;" Daniel ix, 9; "To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him."

We thus see, both from the declarations of God himself, and from the language of good men, when

speaking of him, that all which he requires of sinners in the Old Testament, in order to bestow pardon upon them, is repentance and reformation.

Let us next examine, whether he have required any other terms in the New Testament. Luke xviii, 3, Jesus lays down this maxim for directing the conduct of his disciples in regard to the forgiveness of injuries: "If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him: and if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent, thou shalt forgive him." Where we find, that all we are allowed to require of men, who have offended us, before we forgive them, is that they repent. And shall God require more in regard to those, who have offended him? shall he insist upon receiving satisfaction from a third person, and shall that satisfaction consist in his voluntarily bearing the punishment due to the offender? This would be to make God less merciful than man, to represent him as imposing a harder service upon his creatures than he chose to perform himself, which is directly contrary to the dictates of reason and the language of Scripture. We are there exhorted to be merciful, even as our father in Heaven is merciful; which supposes, that he is much more ready to forgive those, who have offended him, and to do them good, than we are. In the Lord's prayer we are directed to ask, that God would forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us,

that is, agreeable to the rule which Christ himself has laid down, that he would forgive us when we repent, in the same manner as we forgive others when they repent. But if the doctrine of the atonement were true, in order to imitate God we must require something more than bare repentance before we could with propriety forgive—some kind of satisfaction, if not from the offender, yet from another person, to appease our resentment, and to render it consistent with our dignity to bestow pardon.

There are two parables, by which Jesus represents to us the full and complete manner in which God forgives the offences of mankind, neither of which bears any resemblance to the method of satisfaction and atonement, but they both perfectly accord with the idea of pardon being bestowed upon repentance only. When Peter asked him, how often he should forgive his brother, and Jesus told him, to seventy times seven, lest he should think the injunction hard, he illustrates the equity of the command by a parable, in which a king is represented as having a servant, who owed him ten thousand talents, whom he was about to sell for payment, but, because he desired him, he remitted the whole debt. The same servant, however, meeting with a fellow servant, who owed him a much smaller sum, refuses to listen to his cries, and executes the law upon him with the utmost rigour, which brings upon him the resentment and punishment of his master. This parable was evidently intended to teach us how rea-

sonable it is, that we, who obtain forgiveness from God, when we repent of our sins and implore pardon, should grant the like favour to our brethren, whenever they discover a like temper in regard to their offences against us, and the danger we expose ourselves to, if we show hardness of heart toward them, when we have experienced so much lenity ourselves.

But nothing can more strongly illustrate the ideas, which Christ entertained of the readiness of God to pardon his offending children, when they repent of their faults and come to him to ask forgiveness, than the parable of the prodigal son; where we find, that, although the son had spent his time with harlots and wasted his father's substance in riotous living, yet, when he repents and returns home, the father, instead of waiting for his approach, goes out to meet him, falls upon his neck, and kisses him. In this parable there is no third person introduced to prevail upon the father to forgive his son and to receive him again into favour; nor is any such person wanted under the divine government.

In all the other discourses of Christ, we find him speaking of repentance and good works like the other prophets, who went before him, as what were alone necessary to procure for us the mercy and favour of God; nor does he give us the smallest hint, that their doctrine on this subject was defective, and that beside these things it was necessary to rely upon his merits.

The silence of Jesus upon this subject, if the common doctrine of atonement and satisfaction be supposed to be true, is wholly unaccountable. If the belief of it had been necessary to the salvation of men, he would not have failed to have told them so plainly, in words, which could not have been misunderstood; but we find no such declarations in any of his discourses, or in those of his apostles. On the contrary, they teach us many things which are inconsistent with it. Thus Peter says before Cornelius, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons, but that in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him." And the apostle Paul tells us, Romans iii, 24; "That we are justified freely by the grace of God, through the redemption in Christ Jesus." But if a full and a proper satisfaction was made for sin, it would be impossible that we should be justified by free grace. The Being who gives that, for which he is paid a full compensation, does not exercise benevolence or bestow a favour.

Upon the whole then we see, that the language of the New Testament corresponds with that of the Old, and that they both agree in representing the terms, upon which sinners obtain forgiveness, to be repentance and reformation. It cannot be denied, indeed, that Christ himself and his apostles do speak of our sins in connection with his death; not however as making any satisfaction to divine justice for them, but in a way, which will be easily ex-

plained, when we come in the next discourses to show the purposes, which were answered by the death of Christ. In the mean time I shall conclude with making two observations.

The first is, that the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins upon repentance is not a doctrine peculiar to the Gospel of Christ, as many are apt to imagine. It was taught, as we have seen, in the plainest manner by the Jewish Scriptures. Even the Ninevites, who were heathen, and had nothing but the light of nature for their guide, were not destitute of just notions upon this subject; for they encourage themselves to cry mightily unto God, and to turn from their evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands, with the hope that God may repent and turn away from his fierce anger. And, much as the Scribes and Pharisees had corrupted the other doctrines of the sacred writings, it does not appear, that they had ventured to misrepresent this. Christ does not, therefore, attempt to correct their notions, or to teach them any new doctrine, upon the subject of the divine mercy to the penitent. He has given us, however, some very striking and beautiful illustrations of it; and, by teaching mankind the most important truths on other subjects, and setting before them the most powerful motives to forsake their sins, where they stood in need of information, he has shown the mercy of God to sinful men in a more affecting light than it was ever seen in before.

The second is, that we ought to be thankful to

God, that we are assured of forgiveness upon such clear and unexceptionable authority. We are taught it by God himself, or by those, who speak in his name and by his direction—a surer ground of hope we could not possess. Let us lift up our hearts in praise to him, who has condescended to remove our fears and to quiet our apprehensions upon so interesting a subject, and let the hope of pardon induce us to repent of our sins.

SERMON XXVIII.

ON THE DESIGN AND ENDS OF THE DEATH OF CHRIST.

I COR. i, 22, 24.

For the Jews require a Sign, and the Greeks seek after Wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a Stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks Foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the Power of God, and the Wisdom of God.

IN the last discourse I stated the object that I had now in view, which was to prove, that there was no foundation in reason or Scripture for that doctrine which supposes, that a proper, real, and full satisfaction must be offered to divine justice, before the sins of mankind could be pardoned, and that such a satisfaction was made by the obedience and death of Christ. In prosecution of this design I first inquired on what terms God is represented in Scripture as pardoning sinners; whence it appeared, that the only conditions of forgiveness mentioned in the Old and New Testament were repentance and reformation: wherever these appeared, a free and full pardon was considered as the necessary consequence, without reference to the death of Christ, or any other

future event. If this be the doctrine of Scripture, it follows, that Christ could not have died to make satisfaction for the sins of men in order to reconcile God to them; for no such satisfaction is wanted, God appearing to forgive freely, and saying nothing of his being induced to do it in consideration of what Christ was to do or suffer. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged, that important benefits are supposed in the New Testament to arise from the death of Christ, and that in particular it had great influence in delivering men from their sins. We shall now, therefore, agreeably to the plan laid down in the last discourse, inquire what were the great ends to be answered by the death of Christ, and what is the foundation of the strong language used respecting that event.

For this purpose I shall first consider what is suggested by the fact itself as connected with his resurrection, and how far this agrees with the language of the New Testament. It is evident that there is often a language in facts, which speaks as strongly as words can do, and which almost supersedes the necessity of any verbal explanation. Thus the miracles performed by Christ speak so plainly for themselves, and were such obvious proofs of a divine mission, that there was no occasion to explain their design; the language which each of them speaks is plainly this: He, who thus changes the course of nature, must have authority from the God of nature for that purpose; he is employed by him for some

important design; what he says and does demands our careful attention. Accordingly, we find that Christ in general wrought the miracle, and left it to the spectator to draw the proper inference, without making any comment himself. What then is the obvious design of the death of Christ, as it may be inferred from the fact itself? The Jews, by putting him to death, intended nothing more than gratifying their malice, which had been provoked by his censures and reproofs, and delivering themselves from a troublesome enemy. But what we have to determine is, what was the principal design of Providence in permitting him to be put to death.

Now it is undeniable, that Christ taught the doctrine of a resurrection from the dead, both for the righteous and the wicked, to be followed by a state of reward and happiness for the one, and of punishment for the other. When, therefore, we see him, who taught this doctrine, dying upon the cross, rising again from the dead, and in the presence of his disciples ascending into Heaven; what is the obvious meaning which such facts suggest, without interpretation? Is it not, that this was intended to be an example and specimen of what God intends for all good men? In this view of the subject, they have the happiest tendency to establish our faith in the doctrine of a resurrection from the dead, and of a future state of reward and punishments; for we behold one (who although a prophet, and possessed of extraordinary powers, was yet a man like our-

selves), after lying dead for some time, rising to life again, and ascending to God. In his person, therefore, we have exhibited to our eyes a demonstration of what the divine Being intends doing for all good men. The words of a teacher are liable to be misunderstood; what he says in a figurative sense may be understood literally, and his meaning hereby utterly mistaken. To misconstruction of this kind the language of prophecy is peculiarly liable; of which the Jews themselves have furnished us with a striking example in regard to their Messiah; but here is a future event of the most interesting kind foretold, and the nature of that event explained by an example. What can be more satisfactory than a promise thus illustrated? When one man engages to pay to another a particular sum of money at some distant period, he puts into his hand some portion of it immediately, as a pledge of his intentions to pay the whole at the appointed season. In like manner, God promising to restore all good men to life again gives them a pledge of his intentions, by raising up his son Jesus. That this was the design of Christ's resurrection, we might infer from the fact itself, without hearing the design of it explained; but we are not destitute of passages of Scripture to prove the same thing. Thus we find Christ is called the first begotten of the dead, that is, the first born son, who will be followed by many brethren to be born in due time. He is the first fruits of them that slept, who precedes the general resurrection of them that sleep, in

the same manner as the first fruits precede the harvest. He is also the first born of every creature, or rather of the whole creation, that is, of Christians; for Christians are considered and spoken of as a new creation. That the apostle Paul understood the connection, which there is between the resurrection of Jesus and that of his disciples, is evident from the question, which he asks 1 Cor. xv, 12, "Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you, that there is no resurrection of the dead?" He appears surprised that any, who admitted the former, should deny the other; since they were both necessarily connected together. From the nature of the fact, then, and from the language of the sacred writers it appears, that the resurrection of Jesus was intended to establish the belief of the resurrection of his followers.

This cannot but be deemed a very important design; for we have no hopes of a future life but what are founded upon a resurrection from the dead: let the evidence of this be removed, and our prospect of immortality is destroyed with it. On the other hand, let the doctrine of a resurrection from the dead be supposed to be firmly established, and the belief of a future state of rewards and punishments for the righteous and wicked follows of course. Now it is evident, then, that nothing can afford a more powerful incitement to a virtuous conduct, or more effectually deter from the practice of vice, than the hope of a happy existence beyond the grave of eter-

nal duration as the reward of the one, and the fear of losing such an existence, beside so much misery, as the punishment of the other. These are arguments, which infinitely outweigh all other considerations that can be offered to the minds of rational beings, who are capable of doing good or evil. When we say to a man, that, if he pursue a virtuous course, he will secure to himself peace of mind, the esteem and honour of his fellow creatures, and a reasonable share of the external comforts of life, we employ arguments, which will have great weight with every being, who has a just regard to his own interests, and induce him to adopt the course which we recommend: but what are these motives, when compared with those, which an eternal existence holds out to his view? In the one case, he has the prospect of real and solid advantages and pleasures, but they can be enjoyed only for a few years, during the short period of human life; in the other, they are far superiour in degree, and will last for ever, which must give them infinitely greater interest. This conclusion is also supported by observation and experience. From the hope of future happiness and the dread of future punishment, men have been induced to break off inveterate habits, to abandon the most agreeable indulgences, in order to enter upon a course of piety and virtue, and likewise to persevere in it in circumstances of the severest trial and danger, where they have been obliged to give up liberty, property, ease, and every enjoy-

ment of life, and even life itself. All this many have done, rather than forfeit the hopes of immortality by violating the dictates of conscience. Whatever, therefore, furnishes us with the certain evidence of a future life, must afford the most effectual means of reclaiming us from our sins, and of inducing us to embrace and persevere in a course of virtue. This, as we have just seen, is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead: hence we perceive the importance of that event, and how deservedly so much stress is laid upon it in the Scriptures.

But whatever degree of importance and utility belongs to the resurrection of Jesus must belong also to his death: if one be the means of inducing us to repent of and forsake our sins, and of hereby delivering us from their guilt and evil consequences, so is the other; if this be the only foundation of our hopes of immortality, so is that, for the two events are necessarily connected together, one being introductory to the other; unless Christ had died, he could not have risen from the dead. This view of the death of Christ, as opening a way for his resurrection, impresses my mind very forcibly as the true design of that event, and the principal circumstance from which it derives it's importance: it shows the necessity of his dying by crucifixion, and is the true key to many passages of Scripture, the meaning of which it would otherwise be difficult to understand.

When we consider, how much Christ honoured God in his life, we are ready to wonder, that he should die so painful and ignominious a death as that which he suffered upon the cross; but the reason is now obvious. The propriety of permitting him to die by crucifixion appears from it's being a public death, at which both friends and enemies might be present and satisfy themselves of the fact. Had he died of a natural disorder, of a fever, a consumption, or in any other way than as a malefactor, he must have departed from life in private, in the presence of his friends only, which might have left room for suspicion, that some kind of fraud and imposture had been practised, and that the report of his death was not true, which must have proportionally weakened the evidence of his resurrection; but the manner in which divine Providence appointed him to die is liable to no such objection. By expiring upon the cross, he died in the presence of his enemies, who would not fail to satisfy themselves of the fact. And the more certainly we know, that he died, the more certainly do we know, that he rose from the dead.

That the Messiah should suffer death, and especially so ignominious a one as that of the cross, was totally inconsistent with the ideas which the Jews had formed of that great prophet, and an almost invincible objection to their admitting the pretensions of Jesus. The Gentiles also, who had been accustomed to be instructed by philosophers and orators

of great fame, turned away with contempt from a master, who had suffered as a malefactor. To both the cross was the principal means of preventing them from becoming Christians; but if the observation just made about the necessity of his dying in public be well founded, no circumstance could be better adapted to establish their faith in his resurrection, nor therefore more fully display the wisdom of divine Providence in permitting such an event, or his power in accomplishing an important end by such apparently inadequate means. This accounts for the language of the apostle in the text: "we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them that are called," (that is, to Christians, both Jews and Greeks) "Christ, the power of God, and the wisdom of God." In the same spirit he says, 1 Cor. ii, 1, 2, "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech, or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God; for I determined not to know" (or rather not to make known) "any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." The principal subject of his discourses was the resurrection of Jesus, and as connected with that event and necessary to prove it, his crucifixion.

"I have already observed, that, as the death of Christ was necessary to his resurrection, whatever advantages arise to mankind from the latter event may justly be attributed to the former. This will

explain to you, why the death of Christ is represented by the apostles, as having such powerful moral influence in cleansing men from the guilt, and delivering men from the consequences of their sins. Thus the apostle Paul says, Titus ii, 14; "Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." The design of Christ in submitting to death was to recover us from all evil habits and practices, and to make us zealous for whatever is good; for he knows that, by dying and the consequences which would ensue, he should establish the certainty of a future state of rewards for good men, and supply by this means the most powerful motives for repentance and reformation of manners. In his Epistle to the Ephesians, ch. v, verses 25, 27, he inforces the duty of conjugal affection from the affection, which Christ has shown to his church in dying for it, mentioning at the same time the important reformation he intended to produce in it: "Husbands, love your wives," says he, "even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water, by the word," (that is, by baptism and the preaching the word) "that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." We have here the design mentioned, with which Christ submitted to death—it was to render his church holy and

without blemish, to furnish her with the means of becoming so in the manner before mentioned. This was an instance of benevolence well deserving of praise and imitation; for, although Christ was passive in regard to his resurrection, being raised from the dead by the power of the father, yet his death was voluntary, what he foresaw from the beginning of his public ministry would be the consequence of his assuming the character of a divine messenger, but cheerfully yielded to in obedience to the will of his father and for the benefit of mankind, 1 Peter ii, 24; "Who his own self bare our sins," (that is, not suffered the punishment due to them, but carried them away, as the word signifies) "in his own body on the tree;" Rev. i, 5; "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood;" where we find the moral tendency of the death of Christ in delivering men from the pollution of sin is represented by the effect of water in purifying the person.

// The important benefits attributed in these passages to the death of Christ are in other places ascribed to his resurrection from the dead; Rom. iv, 25; "Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification," that is, our deliverance or salvation. Christ was given up to death on account of our sins, in order to deliver us from them. And he was raised to life for the same purpose, that, by teaching us the doctrine of a future

life, he might induce us to forsake our sins, Rom. v, 10; "For if when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his son, much more being reconciled we shall be saved by his life." The apostle's design here is to show, how well grounded the hopes, which Gentiles entertained of future happiness, were; and for this purpose he observes, that, if God had been at so much expense to permit the death of his son in order to introduce them from the state of enemies, which was their condition, into the privileges of the Christians, which was that of friends and persons reconciled, it was not likely he would abandon the work, when nothing more was necessary for completing it, than continuing his son in life and glory as an example of what he intended to do for others; Rom. viii, 34; "Who is he that condemneth; it is Christ that died, yea rather that is risen again, who also maketh intercession for us." The apostle reasons in this passage pretty much in the same way as in the preceding: he argues, that those, who had embraced the Gospel, could not be condemned to future punishment, because God had already shown his good will to them by permitting the death of his son, and still more so by raising him from the dead, and taking him up to Heaven, where he enjoys a place of honour, and is allowed to intercede and pray for his disciples, 1 Peter i, 3; "Blessed be the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again to a lively hope, by the re-

surrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away." You see, that in this last passage the lively hope of an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, is said to be obtained by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead; but it could have been acquired in no other way from that event, than by considering it as intended to be an example and pledge of the same favour being bestowed upon others.

If Christ died in order to exemplify a resurrection from the dead, from the belief of which such important advantages arise to mankind, by inducing them to repent of and forsake their sins, we see the reason, why he is said to die for us and to die for our sins. John x, 11: "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." xv, 13, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." Rom. iv, 25; "Who was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification." 1 Peter iii, 18; "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us unto God."

Thus it appears, then, that the great design of the death of Christ was to afford us the best evidence of a future life, by giving us in his own person an example of a resurrection fron the dead. This is sufficiently clear from the nature of the fact itself, and is

perfectly consistent with the language of Scripture. However, although this is the principal and leading design, there may be other secondary and subordinate ends answered by the same event. Such a constitution of things is sufficiently agreeable to the conduct of Providence in other instances, where we find a variety of effects produced by the same cause. Thus the sun, which enlightens, also serves to warm us, and to preserve the planets in their courses. The same air, which is necessary for the support of animal, is equally necessary for the support of vegetable life, for the flight of birds, for the sailing of ships upon the ocean, for raising clouds, and distributing rain. We ought not to be surprised, therefore, if in the same manner the father of mercies, who delights in every opportunity of doing good, should choose to accomplish a variety of useful purposes by the death of his son. One or two of these I shall briefly mention.

Thus the resurrection of Christ from the dead was intended to establish the truth of his pretensions to a divine mission, John ii, 18, 19; "Then answered the Jews and said unto him, what sign showest thou unto us, seeing thou doest these things? Jesus answered and said unto them, destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." And on another occasion, Matthew xvi, 4, he says, "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign, and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas." As the event foretold by him was

a miraculous exertion of divine power, his rising again from the dead, agreeably to his predictions, was a proof of his mission as a prophet and of the truth of his doctrine.

As it was necessary, that Christ should submit to the sufferings of death in order to accomplish the great purpose, for which he came into the world, and as he died with the best temper of mind, he is represented as intending to afford us an example of the disposition, with which we ought to bear sufferings, 1 Peter ii, 21; "Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow his steps." His conduct in suffering is, therefore, very properly proposed for our imitation. Phil. ii, 5: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the the form of God" (by his miraculous powers) "thought it not robbery to be equal with God;" (thought it not a thing to be catched at to be like God) "but made himself of no reputation, and became obedient to death, even the death of the cross." 1 John iii, 16: "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he" (that is, Christ) "laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."

In the same manner it may be shown, that other ends of a secondary nature, not inconsistent with the original design, were intended to be answered by the death of Christ; but in this number we never find making satisfaction to divine justice for the sins of men. Those expressions, which have been sup-

posed to countenance this idea, are deemed then figures of speech or allusions to the Jewish rites and ceremonies. The passages of Scripture which contain them I should now proceed to examine, and to show, that, when properly interpreted, they are perfectly consistent with the principles now laid down, that it was the great design of the death of Christ to ascertain and exemplify the doctrine of a resurrection to eternal life; and this examination I must defer to a future opportunity.

In the mean time, I shall observe first, that what has been said shows us, in what respects the death of Christ differs from that of other martyrs to truth. That Jesus deserved this honourable title is sufficiently evident from the history of his death; in which we find, that he maintained his pretensions to a divine commission at his trial, when he could have nothing in prospect but certain death as the consequence, thus witnessing before Pilate a good confession at a time, when, by renouncing his pretensions, he might have saved his life. This conduct, in such circumstances, is a strong testimony to the truth of his mission; for he could not but know whether he had received a commission from Heaven for what he had said and done, or not. To persist in asserting that he had, with a cruel death before him, he could have no motive but a conviction, that what he had said was true. The truth of the Gospel is, therefore, confirmed by the death of Christ; it was sealed as it were with his

blood, and his dying testimony in the prospect of a violent death is so much the more valuable than that of other martyrs, as he had better opportunities for knowing the truth. All that we can infer from the conduct of those, who in other cases chose to suffer death rather than renounce their opinions, is, that they believe them to be true, not that they really are so; for there have been martyrs for errour as well as for truth. But Christ was in circumstances, in which he could not but know, whether what he declared were true; for it related to a matter of fact, his receiving a commission from God. This however is not the only or principal benefit, which we derive from the death of Christ; it was intended to answer a much nobler purpose, which could not be accomplished by the death of the most illustrious martyr for the truth.

Secondly, an argument may be derived from this subject to prove the humanity of Christ. If the resurrection of Christ be an evidence of the resurrection of his followers, as the Scriptures constantly suppose without even attempting a proof, it must be, because he is a man like ourselves; for the analogy of the divine dispensations teaches us, that what God does for an individual of any class of beings, he will do for every other individual of the same class, who resembles him in character. Thus then we are able to conclude, that, if he raised one of the most virtuous characters into a

state of being, he will raise up every other, who possesses the same excellence. But supposing that Jesus was God, or a superangelic Being united with a man, it would by no means follow, that by raising such a compound Being from the grave would prove an intention to raise the human race, who are creatures of quite a different nature. Yet the Scriptures always suppose a close and evident connection between the resurrection of Jesus and that of his followers; which is a plain proof, that they had no ideas of his being any thing more than a man.

Thirdly, we may observe the pernicious consequence arising from supposing Jesus Christ to be God, or a being superiour in nature to the rest of the human race. It weakens the evidence of the most interesting of all human hopes, the prospect of a resurrection to eternal life; for no sooner have we raised him to a rank of creatures above that of man, than we immediately lose the force of the argument, which runs so much throughout the writings of the New Testament, particularly the Epistles; thus and thus has God done for Christ, and thus therefore will he do for you. Let us not, therefore, give up this important doctrine so favourable to our best prospects, as well as agreeable to the obvious appearances of things, and the uniform language of Scripture, without the clearest evidence—evidence, which, I am persuaded,

it is impossible to obtain. And now may the God of peace, who brought again from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight. Amen.

SERMON XXIX.

THE NATURE AND END OF THE SACRIFICES OF THE MOSAIC LAW EXPLAINED.

ROM. V, 11.

And not only so, but we also joy in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the Atonement.

THOSE, whose opinions we oppose, maintain that Christ, by his obedience to death, made a proper, a real, and full satisfaction to divine justice for the sins of men; so that whoever by faith relies upon his sufferings is justified in the sight of God, and has his sins no longer imputed to him. This opinion is called the doctrine of the atonement; and the belief of it is supposed to be absolutely necessary to obtain forgiveness of sins and eternal life hereafter. To make this atonement is supposed to be the great design and end of the Christian dispensation—that which Christ, the second person in the Trinity, had in view in coming into the world: it is also imagined that there is a reference to it in the rites and ceremonies of the Mosaic law, particularly in the atonement and sacrifices which that law requires, and that these were principally figures, to

represent to men, at that time the true sacrifice and atonement afterward to be made by Christ.

I have already shown how unnecessary these methods of averting the divine displeasure from sinners are, by proving, that all God requires in order to bestow forgiveness, is repentance and reformation. I have also shown, that the great design of the death of Christ was, to give an example of a resurrection from the dead to eternal life, for the purpose of establishing the faith of Christians in that important and interesting event, and that the beneficial consequences attributed to it arise thence.

I should now proceed to examine those figurative representations which are given of the death of Christ, and to show how well those correspond with the idea before-mentioned, as it's principal design; but the doctrine of the atonement of Christ is supposed to derive so much countenance and support from the atonements of the Jewish ritual, that it will be necessary to consider their design, and use, in order to determine how far the inferences, so confidently drawn from them, are just; and if we can prove that they were of no avail by themselves to take away the guilt of sin and secure the favour of God, but were appointed for a different purpose, we shall have a strong presumption that the death of Christ, so often spoken of in the same light, could have no such effect.

These atonements were required on a great variety of occasions, for different persons and things; but

they had one general design, which was to maintain a regular and becoming intercourse between God and his people in the ordinances of religious worship. In order to understand the propriety of them in this view, it is necessary to remember the peculiar relation in which God stood to the children of Israel; that he was not only their God, but likewise their king, dwelling among his subjects by a visible symbol, in a royal pavilion, or tabernacle. It became necessary, therefore, that certain ceremonies should be instituted, to regulate the intercourse between these subjects and their sovereign, between this people and their God, and that proper officers should be set apart to attend upon his royal presence, to perform the services of the court, and to conduct or manage the intercourse of the people with the Lord their God. In this ritual we find certain atonements prescribed on various occasions for different purposes. We shall reduce them to different heads, in order to take a general view of their design, and afterward make some observation upon the whole.

Thus, first, we find atonement appointed at the first dedication or consecration of things or persons to the service of God, whereby things were solemnly appropriated or set apart to be solely employed in that service, and persons were invested with and acknowledged to have a right or privilege to attend upon and perform the appointed acts of religious worship, or other services, allotted to them accord-

ing to their station, office, and rank, and so became in a correspondent degree holy.

I. At the time that Moses was directed to consecrate Aaron and his sons to the priest's office, he was commanded also to make a particular atonement for the altar each day during the seven days of their consecration, Exod. xxix, 36, 37: "And thou shalt offer every day a bullock for a sin offering, for atonement; and thou shalt cleanse the altar, when thou hast made an atonement for it, and thou shalt anoint it to sanctify it. Seven days thou shalt make an atonement for the altar, and sanctify it; and it shall be an altar most holy: whatsoever toucheth the altar shall be holy."

II. The atonement is mentioned also in the order, which was given for the consecration of Aaron and his sons to the priest's office, Exod, xxix, 33: "And they shall eat those things, wherewith the atonement was made, to consecrate and to sanctify them." And when this order was executed, Moses charged them, Lev. viii, 34: "As he hath done this day, so the Lord hath commanded to do, to make an atonement for you."

III. At the induction of the Levites into their office and ministry, an order was given to make atonement for them, Num. viii, 12: "And the Levites shall lay their hands upon the heads of the bullocks; and thou shalt offer the one for a sin offering, and the other for a burnt offering unto the Lord, to make an atonement for the Levites."

Agreeably to this it is added, verse the 21st, "And Aaron made an atonement for them to cleanse them."

Lastly, after the dedication of the tabernacle and altar, with what belonged to them, and the consecration of Aaron and his sons for seven days were completed, on the next day there seems to have been a solemn sanctification of the whole people of Israel to the service of God, at least at the first act of worship, which the new high priest performed on their account and in their name. We are told he made atonement for them, Lev. ix, 7: "And Moses said unto Aaron, Go unto the altar, and offer the offering of the people, and make an atonement for them."

Secondly, They who were thus solemnly consecrated or devoted to the service of God, and therefore invested with a right or privilege of approaching into his presence, and performing or attending on acts of religious worship, might freely exercise and enjoy that right, not only in the stated and enjoined services of the tabernacle, whether at the daily sacrifices or on the more solemn festival occasions, but also might present themselves and offer freewill offerings whenever they pleased: yet on this purely voluntary occasion we find atonement, which therefore, I think, must be considered as a formal acknowledgment of the privilege they claimed, and a declaration of the acceptance of them in the exercise of it. Thus we find, that Aaron, by the direction of Moses, the next day after his consecration was completed, of-

fered considerable sacrifices, first for himself and then for the people, and made atonement for both, Lev. ix, 7: "And Moses said unto Aaron, Go unto the altar, and offer thy sin offering, and thy burnt offering, and make an atonement for thyself and for the people; and offer the offering of the people, and make an atonement for them, as the Lord commanded." How Aaron performed this is very particularly described in the following verses; and the manner, in which God manifested his acceptance of this solemn service by the ministry of his new high priest, is related in the close of the chapter, where we find, that "the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people, and that a fire came from the Lord and consumed upon the altar the burnt offering and the fat."

Under this class I apprehend we ought to reckon the atonement appointed for all the people when assembled at the great festivals. Thus on the first day of the feast of unleavened bread with other sacrifices there is ordered, Num. xxviii, 22, "one goat for a sin offering to make an atonement for you:" and this, as well as the rest, was to be repeated each day of that feast. So on the day of offering the first fruits, verse 30, we read these words: "One kid of the goats to make an atonement for you."

In like manner, at the feast of trumpets on the first day of the seventh month, chapter xxix, 5, the same words occur, "one kid of the goats for a

sin offering to make an atonement for you." These were formal acknowledgments on the part of God of the privilege, which they claimed, of approaching God to worship him, and a declaration of acceptance of them in the exercise of it.

Secondly, If any person among the people thought proper to bring a burnt sacrifice of the herd or of the flock, it was ordered, Lev. i, 3, 4: "He shall offer it of his own voluntary will at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the Lord; and he shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him." In what manner the atonement was made, whether by some form of words pronounced by the priest, or rather by the very act of sprinkling the blood upon the altar, is uncertain.

Thirdly, When a visible gracious symbol of the divine presence and majesty had thus taken a fixed residence among the people in the holy place, the proper officers been appointed, and the order of external services regulated, by which the people might pay their attendance on and perform acceptable service to their God and King, it became evidently fit and necessary, that the whole of this service should be conducted with great exactness, according to the best ideas of propriety and decorum at that time received among men. Thus as it was, and still continues to be universally acknowledged in the East to be decent, that, when an inferiour waited on a superiour, he should make some present or offering to bespeak a favour-

able acceptance, so it was commanded the Israelites, that no one should appear before the Lord empty, Exodus xxiii, 15. Hence it was required, that every thing which was sacrificed to the Lord should be free from blemish, and that the priest, and particularly the high priest, should be free from blemish and of comely appearance.

But when this method of approaching God as a king was established, circumstances must often happen to the people, which would render it very improper and indecent, according to the sentiments of mankind at that time, that they should attend upon or perform any of the solemn services to the august presence or glorious symbol of the divine majesty. These circumstances might arise from natural and bodily infirmities, from accidents, from providential events, from transgressions of divine injunctions, through ignorance or inadvertence; or from other instances of misbehaviour. While these circumstances continued, the persons afflicted with them were excluded from attending on the tabernacle service; but when they were removed, they were permitted again to approach the presence to offer an appointed sacrifice, and to have an atonement made for them, which atonement seems to have been reconciliatory, or declarative of their restoration or readmission to the rights and privileges of attending on the public service of God's holy place, and a removal of the incapacity they had lain under.

But before we proceed to the consideration of the

several cases of this kind, it will be proper to take notice of a very singular one, which may be ranked most naturally under this class, and that is the cure of a plague of leprosy breaking out in a house, in relation to which very particular directions are given in Lev. xiv, 33, and following verses, concerning the method the priest was to employ for removing the complaint and for cleansing the house; and in conclusion it is said, "and he shall make atonement for the house, and it shall be clean," that is, restored to a capacity of being inhabited by the people of God.

The several cases wherein atonement seems to have been directed by way of reconciliation, or readmission of persons who had been under some incapacity, or forfeiture to the privileges of the tabernacle service, seem to have been the following; that of a cured leper; that of a man who was cured of a running issue; that of a woman who had been in child bed; that of a Nazarite who had been defiled by a person suddenly dying near him. Where it may be observed, that this incapacity arose from natural infirmities, bodily disorders, the ordinary course of nature, and providential events. I shall not trouble you with an account of the various methods by which persons in these different circumstances were ordered to be restored to the rights and privileges of God's people, to worship him in the tabernacle. It will be sufficient to give you an idea of the rest, to recite the directions respecting a

woman who had been in childbed, Lev. xii. 2.—"According to the days of the separation for her infirmity shall she be unclean." And again, verse 4, "she shall touch no hallowed thing, nor come into the sanctuary, until the days of her purification be fulfilled." And then, verse 6, "she shall bring a lamb of the first year for a burnt offering, and a young pigeon, or a turtle dove, for a sin offering, unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, unto the priest; verse 7, who shall offer it before the Lord, and make an atonement for her; and she shall be cleansed from the issue of her blood; v. 8, and if she be not able to bring a lamb, then she shall bring two turtle doves or two young pigeons, the one for a burnt offering, the other for a sin offering; and the priest shall make an atonement for her, and she shall be clean." Here you see then, some offerings are appointed and atonements required, where there could not possibly be any sin, merely to remove certain incapacities under which persons laboured, which unfitted them for appearing in the tabernacle.

Atonements were appointed for sins of ignorance, that is, for those, who really had transgressed some of the commandments of the Lord, but at the time were ignorant of the command or of it's importance and meaning, or were not apprised that they had violated it. When such persons came to be better informed afterward concerning the transgression they were charged with, they could not consider

themselves as in a proper state for coming into the presence of God and joining in his service acceptably. For their relief, therefore, atonements were appointed to remove the incapacity, and restore them to their former privileges. These were different according to the rank or quality of the offender. Lev. iv, 27, "if any one of the common people sin through ignorance, while he doeth somewhat against any of the commandments of the Lord concerning things which ought not to be done, and be guilty; or if his sin which he hath sinned come to his knowledge, then he shall bring his offering, a kid of the goats, a female without blemish, for his sin, which he hath sinned." When this is offered in a proper manner, "the priest shall make atonement for him, and it shall be forgiven him." One of the cases mentioned under this head is that of a man, who being examined upon oath as evidence concerning any thing he had seen or heard, if he doth not utter it, shall bear his iniquity; by which seems not to be intended a person who wilfully and knowingly withheld evidence of the truth in judicial cases, but one who, through want of reflexion or through inadvertence, fails to give a full and true evidence, and afterward recollects that fault. The other cases, with which this is explained, lead us to this interpretation, besides that to withhold evidence in such cases manifestly comes within the compass of that general rule, which will hereafter be taken notice of, "The soul which doth aught presumptuously, no atonement

shall be made for it; it shall die." Atonements were also appointed for sins of ignorance committed by a ruler or person of superiour rank, for those committed by a priest and by the whole congregation; for not only might individuals of every rank and order fall into such sins, but the whole people might likewise commit like errours, and become in consequence unfit to appear in the presence of God, and to worship him with due decorum and acceptance.

In all these cases, atonements were to be made, as soon as the sins of ignorance were discovered and known.

However, many incidents unsuitable to the majesty and holiness of God, and many violations of his commandments, might happen without ever being noticed, and consequently without having any atonement made for them. To remedy all such cases, and to remove all defects and disqualifications arising from them, whether from the holy place itself, it's former and minister, or from the people of God, and at the same time to impress upon their minds an awful reverence of the greatness and purity of God, and a proper humility for their own offences against him, whether known or unknown, atoned or not atoned for, the whole past year, a day of general and solemn expiation was appointed, on which occasion the high priest was to make atonement for the tabernacle and altar for himself, his house, and the people, by the sacrifice of a goat.

After all these atonements were made by certain prescribed rites, the high priest was to complete the atonement for the people with the scape goat, which was to be presented alive to the Lord, by laying both his hands on it's head and confessing over it all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and sending it away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness. With respect to all these general atonements it must be observed on the one hand, that they would not excuse for the omission or neglect of the appointed atonement for particular sins of ignorance, as they come to be known; and on the other, that no atonements at all were appointed for those who sinned wilfully and presumptuously. They were doomed to be instantly put to death, as we have seen above. There were, however, some particular cases of known and wilful transgressions of the law, for which atonements were appointed. These were cases of dishonest dealings between man and man, but such as admitted of compensation of damages suffered thereby. A person, who had been guilty of such practices, was certainly unworthy to appear in the presence of God, or to engage in the service of the high and holy God, so long as the injury he had done his neighbour remained unredressed, and consequently he had not given the proper proof of his repentance. But if every act of dishonesty had been finally and irrevocably to exclude an offender from the privilege

of serving God in the tabernacle, it might have been justly apprehended from the infirmities of human nature, that the number of the excommunicated would have been very great, and the consequences hurtful to the interests of religion. Of the provision made for one of these cases you have an account, Lev. vi, 2, 7: "If a soul sin, and commit a trespass against the Lord, and lie unto his neighbour in that which was delivered to him to keep, or in fellowship, or in a thing taken away by violence, or hath deceived his neighbour, or have found that which was lost, and lieth concerning it, and sweareth falsely; in any of all these that a man doeth, sinning therein, then it shall be, because he hath sinned and is guilty, that he shall restore that which he took violently away, or the thing which he hath deceitfully gotten, or that which was delivered him to keep, or the lost thing which he found, or all that about which he hath sworn falsely, he shall even restore it in the principal, and shall add the fifth part more thereto, and give it unto him to whom it appertaineth, in the day of his trespass offering. And he shall bring his trespass offering unto the Lord, a ram without blemish out of the flock. And the priest shall make an atonement for him before the Lord; and it shall be forgiven him, for any thing of all that he hath done, in trespassing therein."

A singular provision is made for the case of a man committing lewdness with a bondmaid betrothed to a husband. Lev. xix, 21, 22, "He shall bring his

trespass offering unto the Lord, unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, even a ram for a trespass offering; and the priest shall make an atonement for him with the ram of the trespass offering before the Lord, for his sin which he hath done, and the sin which he hath done shall be forgiven him.

These were all the cases of sacrificial atonements; but there were several other kinds of atonements besides appointed by the law, or actually made in consequence of some eminent act of duty, or zeal of particular persons, and the purpose or effect of this was to prevent threatening, or avert present and immediate expressions of divine displeasure from the persons who were liable thereto. Thus an atonement was appointed whenever the people were numbered, and the design was declared to be, "that there be no plague among them when thou numberest them." This atonement consisted in paying a small piece of money, which went to the service of the tabernacle. We find also a stop put to an infliction of punishment already begun, and an atonement made by offering incense, Num. xvi, 46, 47; "And Moses said unto Aaron, Take a censor, and put fire therein from off the altar, and put on incense, and go quickly unto the congregation, and make an atonement for them; for there is wrath gone out from the Lord: the plague is begun. And Aaron took as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the congregation; and behold, the plague was begun amongst the people: and he put on in-

cense, and made an atonement for the people." Another plague was stopped, and an atonement made by the zeal of Phinehas in inflicting exemplary punishment on Zimri and Cozbi, when God said, Num. xxv, 11, "Phinehas hath turned my wrath away from the children of Israel (while he was zealous for my sake among them), that I consumed not the children of Israel." In like manner, when a famine was inflicted on the land, for the injustice and violence committed by Saul against the Gibeonites; David inquired of them, what shall I do for you, and wherewith shall I make the atonement, that ye may behold the inheritance of the Lord? By which I apprehend he did not mean only, wherewith shall I make you a satisfaction? but, as appears from the then present state of things, and the constant use of the word atonement, wherewith shall I remove the present expression of divine displeasure? We read also Exodus, xxxii, 30, that Moses proposed to prevent immediate infliction of punishment, and to make atonement for the sin of the people in the business of the golden calf, by interceding for them: "Ye have sinned a great sin; and now I will go unto the Lord, peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin."

Having now collected all the cases, for which atonements were appointed by the law of Moses, or in which contrary atonements were actually made, I proceed to offer some observations upon them. First: It is obvious to remark, that a great part of

the appointed atonements bear no relation at all to moral conduct, to merit or demerit; for many of them were appointed for things altogether incapable thereof, such as the golden and brazen altar, the tabernacle, and the utensils respectively belonging to them; also leprous houses. Others, which were appointed for persons, related to circumstances of no moral quality, such as natural infirmities, diseases, and accidental events. As to sins of ignorance, for which atonements were appointed, if they had in them any bad moral conduct or demerit, it was of the least kind, and consequent upon the imperfections inseparable from human nature. However, if the offence was such as admitted compensation, we find a full compensation, and with it an additional fine was to be paid down before an atonement could be made as to acts of fraud, falsehood, and injustice between man and man. Though these are certainly criminal, yet it seems very expedient, that after restitution and compensation for damages done, the offending parties should be restored to the common privileges of public worship in the house of God, not only for the reason hinted at, but also to promote peace, and conciliate and restore mutual confidence in society, to which the injured and offended are commonly too backward. As for the atonement for the man, who had debauched a bondmaid betrothed to a husband, we ought to consider how few civil or natural rights bondservants could claim, and how little they were esteemed at that

time, and consequently that this would not be regarded as a very heinous transgression in an age and country, that considered concubinage with female slaves as deserving no reproach. Hence this law (which seems particularly directed against the invasions of masters on the purity and honour of the marriage bed of their dependents) seems to be of the same kind with that which allowed divorce, on which our Lord says, "for the hardness of your heart, he (Moses) wrote you this precept." Mark v, 5.

Secondly: It may be observed farther, with relation to the extraordinary atonements made by some eminent act of zeal and duty, or prayer of some eminent person, whereby some impending judgment was averted, or plague actually begun was stopped, that a full pardon does not appear to have been obtained for the offenders hereby, but only further time and a continuance of their privileges as the people of God, whereby they might be brought to a due sense of their misconduct, and to true repentance and amendment, and in consequence thereof be restored to divine favour. It is very observable, that when Moses proposed to make an atonement for the people in the matter of the golden calf, Exodus, xxxii, 30, and accordingly interceded earnestly for their forgiveness, the answer which he received concluded with this clause, verse 34—"Nevertheless, in the day when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them:" it is added, verse 35, "and

the Lord plagued the people, because they made the calf which Aaron made." Hence arises that saying of some of the Jewish writers, that in every calamity which hath befallen their nation ever since, hath been mingled an ounce of the golden calf.

Thirdly, All the appointed atonements seem to relate only to the propriety and decorum of the external services of public religious worship in the tabernacle, and the manifestation of the divine presence. This, I think, appears very plain in the atonement at the consecration of the tabernacle, altar, vessels, and minister; also in all those atonements appointed for restoring persons to the privileges of public worship, who had for some time lain under disqualifications, on account of which, like the childbearing woman, it was unlawful for them to touch any holy thing, or come into the sanctuary, till the disqualifying circumstances were removed. Hence it appears reasonable to conclude, that the solemn annual atonements, appointed for the day of expiation, were not intended to convey a plenary forgiveness of all the sins of the children of Israel, considered collectively or individually, but only a yearly general removal of all incapacities or disqualifications for the public worship of God, which either the nation or individuals might have contracted during the course of the preceding year, and which had not otherwise been atoned for. Whenever, therefore, we find forgiveness connected with the priest's making atonement, we must understand it only in respect to

the particular matter of the forgiveness of the forfeiture of the privilege of attending on public worship, which had been incurred.

Fourthly, It may be observed farther, that no atonements are appointed for transgression of the moral law, excepting the case mentioned before. Although we allow, that all the transgressions and sins of the children of Israel were atoned for on the day of expiation, yet, as was observed under the first head, this relates only to the privilege of attending the public worship of God, as appears from the purpose of the other appointments of atonement, and from those, which were made at the same time for the tabernacle, altar, and vessels, to cleanse and to hallow them from the uncleanness of the children of Israel. Agreeably to this observation we find David, lamenting his sin in the matter of Uriah, says among many other things to this purpose, Psalm li, 16; "Thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering." The law had appointed none of these things for cases like his. He adds, "the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." Hence also St. Paul says to the Jews of Antioch in Pisidia, Acts xiii, 39; "By him, all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses." For this law made very few provisions for the forgiveness of transgressions of the moral precepts, but on the contrary denounced, Num. xv, 30;

"The soul that doth aught presumptuously (whether he be born in the land or a stranger) the same reproacheth the Lord; and that soul shall be cut off from among his people; because he hath despised the word of the Lord, and hath broken his commandment, that soul shall utterly be cut off: his iniquity shall be upon him." It is very true, that ample declarations are made in the writings of Moses concerning the divine placability and readiness to forgive penitent sinners; and beside the exhortations he gave to the people to repentance in his life time, he recorded others of the same kind for the use of succeeding ages, when they should suffer rebukes for their sins, assuring them, that, if they returned to God by repentance, he would not fail to return to them by mercies and deliverance. But then, as our Lord said of circumcision, that it was not of Moses but of the fathers, so this was not a distinguishing doctrine of the law of Moses, but a principle of religion well known to the more early patriarchs. On this principle Noah preached repentance to the old world; also Job and his friends acknowledge and reason largely upon it. From what has been said upon the atonements of the Mosaic law, I think it is clear, that they were of no avail by themselves to take away the guilt of sin, and secure the favour of God to sinners; but that they were appointed to maintain a regular intercourse between God and his people in the ordinances of public worship.

If, therefore, the doctrine of atonement for sin,

by satisfying divine justice, and removing the guilt arising from a violation of the moral precepts of religion, be a doctrine of Scripture, it must be founded entirely upon the New Testament; it derives no countenance from the Old; the atonements there mentioned were appointed for a different purpose. If the religious worship founded by Christ appear at the first view very different from that instituted by Moses, by the Gospel no particular place or edifice is appropriated or consecrated for the performance of the solemnities of public worship, to which Christians are required to repair, and at which alone to offer sacrifices and oblations. There is here no cloud of glory, no visible symbol of the presence and majesty of God for the disciples of his son Jesus to worship before. But they are taught, John iv, 24, that "God is a spirit, and those that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." God doth not exercise the office of a civil and political as well as religious ruler over Christians, as he did over the people of the Jews. He has established no where a worldly court, with it's apparatus of officers and ceremonials. As for the term atonement, it is found only once in the whole New Testament, and that is the passage which I have read to you as my text; but even here the original term is wrongly translated. The word, which is thus rendered (καταλλαγην), is elsewhere uniformly translated reconciling or reconciliation, and ought to have been so rendered here, "for if the casting away of them be

be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be but life from the dead?" II Cor. v, 18, 19; "And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation;" and again verse 19, "and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation." Nor is the word here rendered atonement ever used for the atonement mentioned in the law of Moses. By reconcilement in the text, as the word ought to have been rendered, the apostle means our admission to the privileges of the church and people of God, through the promulgation of the Gospel, consequent upon the death of Christ; for he says in verse the second of the chapter, "By whom also we have access by faith into this grace, wherein we stand." But although we are abundantly reconciled, justified, or brought into a more advantageous state of relation to God and favour with him by means of the death of Christ, the promulgation of the Gospel and our faith in him, yet the apostle represents our obtaining a full pardon and salvation from that, as an effect to be yet completed, "much more then being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his son, much more being reconciled we shall be saved by his life:" then follow the words of the text, "and not only so, but we joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have received the atonement," that is, the reconcili-

ation. I have now finished what I proposed; but I cannot conclude without expressing my surprise, that a doctrine should be supposed to be clearly taught in Scripture, and the belief of it made necessary to our salvation, when it appears, that it is not once mentioned in the New Testament, the proper word for atonement not being to be found there, although it so often recurs in the law of Moses; a stronger presumption we could hardly possess, that this is no doctrine of the Gospel. I grant indeed, that the death of Christ is often spoken of under the idea of a sacrifice and offering, but it may be easily shown (which will be the business of the next discourse) that these are mere allusions to the ceremonies of the Mosaic law, or nothing more than figurative expressions.

SERMON XXX.

THE FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE APPLIED TO THE DEATH OF CHRIST IN THE NEW TESTAMENT EXPLAINED.

HEB. ix, 26.

But now once in the End of the World hath he appeared to put away Sin by the Sacrifice of himself.

THE design, which I proposed to myself in these discourses, is to prove, that the opinion, which supposes that Christ by his death made a satisfaction to divine justice for the sins of Christians, so that, in consideration of what he did and suffered on that occasion, God is inclined to pardon them, and to accept of the persons of sinners, has no foundation in the Scriptures. With this view I have shown, that the great end of the death of Christ was to exemplify the doctrine of a future life, by preparing the way for his resurrection from the dead; that the uniform language both of the Old and New Testament is, that God is placable, and disposed to forgive sin upon repentance and reformation; and that the various atonements of the Mosaic law had no relation to moral guilt, but were intended to remove certain ceremonial impurities, which rendered those persons or things, that laboured under them, unfit

for the worship or service of God. Accordingly we have seen, that atonements were required for the tabernacle, the altar, and the vessels used in performing the rites of religion, all things which were not capable of virtue or vice; and that the only two instances for which atonements were appointed, that had an appearance of transgressions of the moral law, were the cases of a fraud practised by one man upon another, and that of a man committing lewdness with a bondwoman betrothed to a husband. But with respect to the former of these cases it was observed, that no atonement was admitted, until the offender had given proper proof of repentance, by restoring the whole of what he had fraudulently taken away, and added besides one fifth part to the principal, and that the only effect of the atonement was to gain him admittance again to the public worship of God in the tabernacle: and with regard to the latter it appeared, that in an age and country, where the bondwoman was a slave and the property of her master, this offence would be deemed of a very trivial nature, and that the law, which permitted a trespass offering in this case, might be given for the same reason as another, which admitted of divorce, namely, on account of the hardness of their hearts.

Hence it follows, that the doctrine of atonement, which supposes the guilt of sinners to be expiated by the death of Christ, derives no countenance from the atonements of the law of Moses, since it ap-

pears that they were appointed for a different purpose—to maintain a regular intercourse between God and his people, by removing certain incapacities of a ceremonial nature. Indeed it appeared, that the word *atonement* occurs but once in the whole of the New Testament, and that in that instance it has been mistranslated. It may still, however, be said, that many expressions are used respecting the death of Christ, which show that, if the word *atonement* be not used, the idea is sufficiently countenanced by the sacred writers. We shall now, therefore, proceed to consider those figurative representations of the death of Christ, with which the Scriptures abound, and by which so many are misled.

It is well known to persons conversant with the writings of the people of the East, that their style in speaking or writing is more figurative than ours, and that similes and allegories are much more common with them than with us. This indeed is sufficiently evident from the books of Scripture alone, and it is no less apparent in the New Testament than in the Old. A great part of our Saviour's most serious discourses are delivered in parables, which are comparisons or allegories drawn out to a considerable length; and his manner of expressing himself is often much more strongly metaphorical, than we are used to in this part of the world; as when he says to his disciples, I am the vine, ye are the branches; my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed; this is my body, which is broken

for you, &c. Expressions like these must infallibly mislead those, who do not bring to the reading of the Scriptures a portion of common sense, sufficient to enable them to distinguish their true and proper meaning through that close covering of figure; for, at the same time that the metaphor is exceedingly strong, the turn of the sentence gives no intimation of it. The evangelists, the apostle Paul, and all the other apostles, write in the same manner. In short this bold metaphorical style, calculated to strike and surprise, was always affected in the East, and there it imposes upon no one. When such is the taste and manner of writing used by the sacred writers, can it be wondered at, that they use figures in speaking of the death of their lord and master, an event so interesting to them, and of such consequence in the religion they taught, an event, which had once greatly astonished and disappointed themselves, and which was the great obstacle to the reception of the Gospel both among Jews and Gentiles? Accordingly we find, that their imaginations were proportionally struck with it, and that they not only describe the manner, the cause, and the operation of it in plain language, but likewise have recourse to a variety of comparisons and strong metaphors, such as were naturally prompted by their own strong feelings, and were calculated to impress the minds of those, to whom they addressed themselves, in a suitable manner.

It is also to be remembered, that the writers of

the New Testament were Jews, educated in a veneration for, and having long lived in the observance of, the institutions of Moses. When, therefore, they were addressing several of their writings to Jews, it was natural for them, when speaking of the death of Christ and it's glorious consequences, to make frequent allusions to those institutions, and the purposes they were designed to serve; and, even to borrow the terms and modes of speech which they found used by Moses and the prophets concerning those matters, and, especially as they wrote in the Greek language, to employ the terms they found in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, which was, at that time, in common use, among a considerable part of the Jewish nation.

The most remarkable of these figurative representations of the death of Christ, which occurs in the New Testament, is that in which he is compared to a sacrifice. Indeed the figure is just and beautiful. In every sacrifice the victim is supposed to die for the good and benefit of the person on whose account it is offered. So Christ, dying in the cause of virtue, and to procure the greatest possible benefit to the human race, is said to have given his life a sacrifice for us. Moreover, as the proper object of the death of Christ was to open a certain prospect of a future life, and thereby operate as a powerful motive to repentance, by which means sinners reinstate themselves in the favour of God, his death is more especially compared to that species of sacrifice which is

called a sin-offering, because the person or thing for which it was offered was freed from certain impurities, and rendered fit for the service of God.

The resemblance between the death of Christ, according to this account of the nature and object of it, and these sacrifices for sin, appears to me a sufficient foundation for it's being called by that name, and would abundantly justify the metaphor, even without making any allowance for the license in the use of figures, which we expect in writers of the East. Why, then, should we look for more points of resemblance between the death of Christ and a sacrifice for sin, than those mentioned above, when the language of Scripture by no means requires any more? Yet upon this circumstance principally has been built a system of principles totally inconsistent with the plain doctrine of Scripture, respecting the forgiveness of sins.

Hence has arisen the notion of the sacrifices prescribed in the Jewish law being appointed by the divine Being as types of this great, complete, and expiatory sacrifice of the death of Christ, which now supersedes and abrogates them. Hence hath the ever blessed God come to be considered as not naturally propitious to his offending creatures, and as refusing his mercy to penitent offenders, till his justice was satisfied by the death of his innocent son, who is supposed to have sustained the utmost effects of the wrath of God, in the place of men, who by sin had exposed themselves to it. Hence too is

argued the necessity of Christ's being equal to God, equal to his Father, in order to his being able to make atonement for the infinite evil there is supposed to be in the smallest offence committed against an infinite being.

As such important consequences are deduced from this idea of Christ being a sacrifice, it will be proper to consider it a little more attentively.

All the texts in which Christ is represented as a sacrifice, either expressly, or by plain reference, are the following:—John i, 29, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world." Ephes. v, 2, "Christ also hath loved us, and given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour;" Heb. vii, 27, "Who needeth not daily to offer up sacrifices; first, for his own sins, and then for the people's; for this he did once, when he offered up himself." The same idea occurs, ch. viii, 3; ix, 12, 26; x, 10, 12, 14, 29; xii, 24; xiii, 12; 1 Pet. i, 2, "Elect unto obedience, and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus;" ver 18—"Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, from your vain conversation, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot;" 1 John ii, 2, "And he is the propitiation (ἱλασμὸς *atonement*) for our sins." iv, 10,—"Herein is love; not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his son to be a propitiation (ἱλασμὸν) for our sins." The two last are the only two texts in the New Testament, in

which the word ἱλασμος, constantly used for atonement in the Greek version of the Old Testament, occurs, Rev. v, 6; "And lo! there stood a lamb as it had been slain;" v. 9; "For thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood."

In regard to these texts it may be observed in general, that the manner in which this idea is introduced, which is only indirectly and often in the style of a figurative allusion, intimates plainly enough, that a few circumstances of resemblance were deemed a sufficient ground for adopting such language. Had the writers really considered the death of Christ as the antitype of the sacrifices under the law, had this been the great and principal end of his death, it would have been asserted in the fullest and plainest manner, and references to it would have been much more frequent than they are.

It should be remembered, that if it could be proved, that the death of Christ was a real sacrifice for sin, and that the sacrifices of the law had a reference to it as types, yet that this would not answer the purpose of the advocates for the doctrine of the atonement; since it has been already shown, that these sacrifices were not intended to remove *moral* guilt, nor had any efficacy for that end, wherefore neither could the death of Christ be designed to do it. But the following reasons may be urged to prove, that the death of Christ is no proper sacrifice for sin, nor the antitype of the Jewish sacrifices, and that the language of Scriptures is sufficiently ac-

counted for without it, being perfectly consistent with what has been said before of the one great end of his life and death.

I. Though the death of Christ is frequently mentioned or alluded to by Isaiah and the other prophets, it is never spoken of as a sin offering. Isaiah indeed says, liii, 4, "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows," which some may suppose to refer to his suffering the evils due to us on account of our sins. But Matthew, who, no doubt, understood the prophecy as well as they, applies these words to our Lord's performing some miracles. Matt. 8, 17: He says he did them, "that it might be fulfilled, which was spoken by the prophet Isaiah, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bore our sicknesses." Now Christ bore the sicknesses of men, not by taking them upon himself and becoming himself diseased in the same manner as they had been, but by removing the disorders they laboured under, that is, by radically curing them. It is said, indeed, by the same prophet, verse 10; "when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin;" but this passage may contain nothing more than a figurative allusion to a sacrifice. The death of Christ might very well be called an offering for sin, because it was the means of inducing men to repent of and forsake their sins, without supposing, that he died as a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice; and it is very unaccountable, that so great an event as the death of Christ should be foretold with so many particular circumstances,

and the proper, ultimate, and grand end and design of it not be pointed out, had it been such as many suppose.

Secondly, The Jewish sacrifices are no where said in the Old Testament to have any reference to another more perfect sacrifice, as might have been expected, if they had really referred to any such more perfect sacrifice, and such a one had been necessary. On the contrary, whenever the legal sacrifices are declared by the prophets to be insufficient to procure the favour of God, the only thing, that is opposed to them as of more value in the sight of God, is personal holiness, good works, or moral virtue. The following texts are instances of this, Psalm li, 16, 17; "For thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." Isaiah i, 11—20; "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to me, saith the Lord? I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts—Bring no more vain oblations—Wash ye, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings, &c." Hosea vi, 6; "For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings." Amos v, 22—27; "Though ye offer me burnt offerings I will not accept them. But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream." Mic. vi, 6, 7, 8; "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow

myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, and ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first born for my transgression? He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

The general strain of the passages now quoted cannot but appear very extraordinary, if the Jewish sacrifices had in reality any reference to the death of Christ, and were intended to prefigure it. We might have expected in that case, that, when the sacrifices and offerings of the Jewish law were declared to be of no avail for obtaining the favour of God, some other offering, to which they referred, would be pronounced to be efficacious. Yet we no where find any such declaration; which is a strong presumption, that they had in fact, no reference to the death of Christ. For can we suppose, that the favourite people of God had a religion and mode of worship prescribed to them, all the beauty and efficacy of which consisted in it's reference to a future event, and yet that not so much as a hint should be given to them of such a reference? Dark, no doubt, (comparatively speaking) was the dispensation, which the Jews were under; but this hypothesis throws a tenfold darkness and gloom upon it. And still more melancholy must their situation have been, if the practical consideration of the death of Christ, as a

sacrifice for sin, be so necessary, as some modern divines represent it to be, in order to give men adequate notions of the divine justice and of the demerits of sin, and if without these apprehensions it is impossible to be regenerate and to have saving faith.

Thirdly, Many other things beside the death of Christ are expressly called sacrifices by the sacred writers; and if it be universally allowed, that they are called so only by way of allusion, why may not the same be the case with the death of Christ? Is it not owing to some prejudice, that the figure is not so obvious in the one case, as in the other? Isaiah lxi, 20; "They shall bring all your brethren, for an offering unto the Lord." Rom. xii, 1; "That ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." Rom. xv, 16; "That I should be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable." Phil. ii, 17; "Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith," &c. iv, 18; "I have received of Epaphroditus the things that were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing to God." 2 Tim. iv, 6; "For I am now ready to be offered." Heb. xiii, 15, 16; "By him, therefore, let us offer the sacrifice of praise continually. But to do good, and to communicate, forget not."

Fifthly, The death of Christ cannot be considered

as a proper sacrifice for sin, because many things, essential to a sacrifice, were in fact wanting in it. While it is only asserted, that the death of Christ is called a sacrifice by way of figure, we are contented with some general resemblance; we do not expect a likeness in every particular, any more than when Christ is called a door and a vine we expect that he should in every respect be like those objects. The most correct writers are not studious of such exactness. It would even make the style quite flat and insipid, and destroy it's beauty and energy to observe it.

But when the death of Christ is maintained to be the very thing itself, nay, the only proper sacrifice for sin that was ever exhibited in the world, it cannot be thought unreasonable if we require to be shown, that it consists at least of every thing that was always deemed essential to such a sacrifice. Now, according to the Jewish ceremonial (from which we must borrow all our notions upon these subjects), it was primarily requisite in every sin offering, that it should be provided and presented by the sinner; for unless the presentation of it were the act and deed of the sinner himself, it could be of no effect whatever. Christ, therefore, could not die as a proper sacrifice for a sinful world, except the world, which lay in wickedness, had provided and presented him to be sacrificed, and also observed a variety of other forms, of which there is no trace in the history of the death of Christ. It is

a just and striking figure to say, that a man, who voluntarily devotes himself to death for the good of others, dies a sacrifice for them; but to become a real sacrifice, the same ceremonies must be observed as were used in sacrifices.

Sixthly, There is nothing in the general manner of the apostles' writing, which might make us think them incapable of taking such great liberties as this in their figures and allusions, without meaning any thing more by them. We meet with many figures in their writings no less bold than this; and if they do not occur quite so often, neither did the subjects of them, nor were they of so much importance. Communion is called an altar; the body of Christ is the veil through which we pass to the holy of holies. We are said to be circumcised in his circumcision, and to be buried with him in baptism. Our sins are crucified with him, and we rise again with him to newness of life. After meeting with figures like these (and many more might be recited quite as harsh as these), can we be surprised that Christ should be said to die a sacrifice for the sins of men, or can we be misled by so obvious a figure? Still less shall we be surprised at this language, if we consider how familiar all the rites of the Jewish religion were to the minds of the apostles. Whatever they were writing about, if there were any resemblance in it to any part of the Jewish ritual, it failed not to obtrude itself, and to influence the style of their composition. As Christ came to save man-

kind from sin and misery, and died in the prosecution of his undertaking, it appears to have been in a manner impossible for a Jew (though he believed nothing more concerning it), not to say, that he died a *sacrifice* for us; so familiar must the figure have been to his mind.

It must also be considered, that the death and crucifixion of Christ were the grand objection to the religion which the apostles preached. It was strongly urged both by Jews and Gentiles. To the former the apostle Paul says it was a stumbling-block; and to the latter, foolishness. It cannot, therefore, appear surprising, that the apostles should make use of all the means in their power to lessen the force of so formidable an objection, and to remove so great an obstacle to the cause in which they were embarked. And what could tend more to this purpose, than to take every opportunity of speaking of it in terms borrowed from the Jewish ritual? The same method was calculated to strike the Gentiles, to whom sacrifices were as familiar as to the Jews.

It is something similar to this view of the death of Christ as a sacrifice, that he is called a priest, and a high priest, by the writers of the New Testament, and particularly by the author of the epistle to the Hebrews: ch. i, 3, "who, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the majesty on high."—viii, 25, "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the utmost, that come unto

God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them;" ix, 11, "But Christ being come a high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands;" x, 12, "But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins, for ever sat down on the right hand of God;" verse 14, "By one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified;" verse 21, "And having a high priest over the house of God." But the very circumstance of Christ being represented as both a priest and sacrifice might have been sufficient to give us to understand, that both representations are only figurative. Both of them taken together are hardly consistent, and introduce confusion into our ideas; for certainly a sacrifice and a priest are different things, and had their distinct, appropriate functions in the Jewish law.

It should also be remembered, that ordinary Christians have frequently the appellation of priests in the New Testament, and are sometimes represented as performing several parts of the priestly office. In this case the figure is obvious; and since the language in both cases is similar, why is not the figure equally evident in both? 1 Peter ii, 5; "Ye are a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices;" v. 9, "But ye are a royal priesthood;" Rev. i, 6; v, 10; "And hast made us kings and priests unto God."

Having dwelt so long upon the death of Christ

as a sacrifice, there is little time left to insist upon the other figurative representations of that event. Indeed there is the less occasion for it, as they have never given rise to those corruptions of Christianity, of which the other has unfortunately been the cause.

Secondly, Christ in the New Testament is said to have died as a curse for us. Gal. iii, 13; "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us."

Mention is made of several kinds of things accursed under the law; but in general they were things devoted to destruction. Christ, therefore, may in a figurative way of speaking be considered as accursed for us in consequence of his devoting himself to death for us; but that this can be nothing more than a figure is evident, because the resemblance will not hold in any other circumstance, and least of all in those, which were most essential to the idea of a curse. For things subject to a curse were always those, which were offensive in the sight of God on account of their connexion with sin, which was the reason why they were doomed to destruction; whereas Christ must have rendered himself peculiarly acceptable to God by his obedience unto death, since it is expressly said, that it was for that reason that he was crowned with glory and honour.

Thirdly, Christ is also compared to the paschal lamb among the Jews. This was killed in commem-

moration of the divine Being passing over and sparing the Israelites, when he killed the first born of the Egyptians at the time of the departure from Egypt; but by the death of Christ we are delivered from a greater evil than that of Egyptian bondage, and our commemoration of it ought to be celebrated with more gratitude and joy; 1 Cor. v, 7, "Christ our passover is sacrificed for us." When the legs of Christ were not broken upon the cross, it is said, John xix, 36, "These things were done, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, a bone of him shall not be broken," evidently referring to the same words, Exodus xii, 46.

Fourthly, We have another figurative representation of the death of Christ; Heb. ix, 16, "For where a Testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator; for a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth."

According to our translation Christ is here represented as a testator, or a person making a testament or will, and bequeathing to mankind the blessings of the Gospel. But the meaning of the apostle is much misrepresented in our translation. He does not appear to allude at all to civil customs or constitutions relative to testaments, but to the manner in which the covenants or dispensations, which God made with Abraham, and afterward with Moses, were ratified. In the 15th verse, he says, "and on this account, he is a mediator of a new covenant

(death happening, or taking place for a release from the transgressions founded on the first covenant) that they, who have been called, might receive the promise of the eternal inheritance." In these last words he intends an opposition to the promise of an earthly and temporal inheritance of Canaan made in the covenant granted to Abraham in Gen. xv. He then adds, verse 16; "For where a covenant is, there it is necessary," (*i. e.* to preserve a conformity to the modes of ratification of God's ancient covenants) "that the death of the covenant victim be offered:" verse 17; "For," (as we see in the cases of old) "a covenant is ratified or confirmed upon dead things; since it is not yet in force, while the victim is alive." In this passage the apostle has in view the story recorded in the 15th chapter of Genesis, in the close of which are these words: "In that same day the Lord made a covenant with Abraham," and his intention is to show, that, as the former covenants were ratified over dead victims, so it was proper, that the new covenant of the Gospel should be attended with the death of Christ.

I have now finished my explanation of the figurative representations given of the death of Christ in the Scriptures, and have shown, that they are perfectly consistent with what has been mentioned as the grand end of his death, ascertaining and exemplifying the doctrine of a future life, and that to interpret them literally would lead us into gross errours and absurdities. There is no foundation, therefore, in the

sacred writers for the prevailing opinion, that the death of Christ was a proper sacrifice for sin, and expiated the guilt of men; for it appears to be founded on a literal interpretation of figurative language. I shall next endeavour to show, that this doctrine is as inconsistent with reason, as it is with Scripture.

SERMON XXXI.

THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST'S ATONEMENT INCONSISTENT WITH REASON.

EZEK. xviii, 20.

The Righteousness of the Righteous shall be upon him, and the Wickedness of the Wicked shall be upon him.

THE doctrine we are opposing supposes, that Christ endured in his own person upon the cross, and during the agony in the garden, the punishment due to sinners on account of their transgressions, and that God was pleased to accept of his sufferings in the place of those he intended to inflict upon offenders; that this was the grand purpose for which Christ came into the world, and that it was prefigured by the sacrifices and atonements of the Mosaic law, which had no efficacy further than as they were considered as referring to this event. It might easily be shown, that the language of Scripture, which has been supposed to authorize this extraordinary doctrine, affords it no countenance; that, although the death of Christ is called a sacrifice, yet it is so denominated only in a figurative sense, in the same manner as Christ in other places is called a door and a vine, because in some respects

he resembled these objects; that, admitting Jesus Christ to have been a real sacrifice, this would not answer the purposes of those who maintain it, since it may be shown, that the sacrifices and atonements of the Mosaic law did not remove moral guilt, and only rendered the persons or things for which they were offered fit for the divine service in the tabernacle, consequently that no resemblance between the death of Christ and a sacrifice could authorise the opinion included under the modern doctrine of the atonement.

But what I now propose to do is to show, that this doctrine is dishonourable to the divine Being, and inconsistent with the principles of justice as well as with the general tenour of Scripture, which would also justify us in rejecting it.

It represents Christ by his obedience and death as fully discharging the debt of sinners in general, or of the few called the elect, and making a proper, real, and full satisfaction to his Father's justice thereby.

Without inquiring at present of what kind this satisfaction may be, which Christ is supposed to have made, whether it consist in paying a debt or in suffering punishment for mankind, I shall observe, that an objection against it occurs at first view, when considered in connection with the doctrine of the Trinity, a doctrine which is likewise maintained by the advocates for the atonement. For according to them each of the three persons in the Trinity is

perfect God, and they are all three of them equal. If therefore it was proper, that the Father should demand satisfaction to his justice, because sinners had violated his laws, it would be equally proper that the Son and Holy Spirit, which are each of them God as well as he, should demand satisfaction likewise. Who is it, then, that offers atonement to the Son? and of what nature is it supposed to be? Shall it be said that, the Son and Holy Spirit being one with the Father, the satisfaction made to him is made to them all? It will then follow, that God makes satisfaction to himself, which is as absurd as supposing, that a man should be contented with paying himself the debt, which another owes him. He, who should pretend that his demands were satisfied in this manner, would be considered as an errant trifler by the rest of mankind, and it is degrading the Deity to the same insignificant character, to represent him as satisfied in this manner.

But if it be admitted (as it must be, for there is not the shadow of an argument for the contrary supposition) that the Son and Holy Spirit are satisfied without an atonement for the sins of mankind, then one or the other of these consequences must follow, either that they are more placable than the Father, and therefore more worthy of our esteem and love, or that they are defective in an essential branch of divine excellence, justice; since they do not insist upon receiving what the excellencies of a perfect Being oblige him to require from offending crea-

tures. Which of these two difficulties it is easier to acquiesce in I am not concerned to inquire; they are each of them insuperable objections to the truth of the doctrine we are combating.

There are two views, under which the atonement of Christ may be considered, as the payment of a debt for sinners, which they were not able to discharge themselves, or as suffering punishment, which was originally due to them. I shall consider each separately, and show that they both lead us into one or more gross errours, and therefore can neither of them be consistent with truth.

I. The atonement supposed to be made by the obedience and death of Christ may be considered as the payment of a debt. Accordingly the assembly of divines at Westminster in their confession of faith declare, that Christ by his obedience and death did fully discharge the debt of those who are justified. Let us see, then, how far this idea of the atonement is consistent with reason and with the divine attributes. If, when I owe a sum of money and am unable to pay, my creditor threaten to put me into prison, a third person may interpose, and to prevent the disgrace and misery, which confinement would occasion, may generously discharge the debt for me. In this transaction there is nothing that is unreasonable or unjust; my creditor is not blamable for demanding the payment of his debt, or for accepting what out of regard to me is voluntarily offered to him by another; for it is no more than what was

due to him, and what he might fairly demand. It is evident, however, that I am under great obligations to my friend, who has discharged my debts to save me from prison, but under none to my creditor, who has insisted upon the full payment of them. If he have done nothing that is unjust, neither hath he done any thing that is merciful or generous: Let us now consider the scheme of atonement in this light. Men have by their sins contracted a debt to divine justice, which they are not able to discharge, and in consequence of this inability are condemned to eternal misery, from which nothing can save them but the payment of the debt, or of something that shall be deemed of equal value. In these circumstances Jesus, moved with compassion by a view of the wretched condition to which we were reduced, offers something to the Father (I will not say what at present) which is deemed an equivalent for the debt, and is accepted as a full discharge of it. In this case it is evident, that we are greatly indebted to the Son of God, who from motives of compassion and benevolence provided the means of discharging the debt, and hereby saved us from eternal misery. But we have nothing to thank the Father for; since he stands in the place of a creditor, who receives his whole debt, without remitting any thing of his claims: here is no mercy or forgiveness exercised, no favour shown; full justice is insisted upon on one side, and fully satisfied on the other. And are the boasted grace and mercy of

God to sinners in the Gospel dispensation really reduced to this? Do they consist in letting the debtor go free, when his debts have been paid by another? O blind apostle! who has told us, that we are justified freely by the grace of God, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. O mistaken Saviour! who has exhorted us to be merciful, as our Father in Heaven is merciful, and to forgive one another, as God forgives us; and who has illustrated this forgiveness by the conduct of a creditor, who, when a debtor had nothing to pay, frankly forgave him all the debt. This system admits of no mercy; it exhibits nothing to our view but rigid justice. It contradicts every page of the Bible, and every fact of the divine dealings toward offending creatures on sacred record. It degrades the character of God to that of certain savage tribes we read of, who, devoting to death all the prisoners taken in war, could only be induced to spare them by having a full ransom paid for them. Away with such a doctrine from our thoughts. It is so plainly inconsistent with every idea of divine mercy and benevolence, as not to deserve a moment's consideration.

I know the reply, that is usually made to this objection to the atonement, that it leaves no room for the exercise of mercy; that God manifested his mercy by furnishing Christ with the means of paying the price of redemption, by sending him to suffer and die: but this is giving up the doctrine entirely; for it is exactly the same thing, whether I remit altoge-

ther a debt owing to me, or furnish another person with money to pay me. If God both pay and receive the debt, what atonement can there be made? every thing is done by him, and nothing by another.

Another view, in which the advocates for the doctrine in question represent the atonement of Christ, is that of suffering the punishment due to sinners on account of their transgression, in consideration of which God is supposed to pardon the offender, and to accept of the sufferings of his son instead of those of the sinner. Hence arises the necessity of Christ being God; for they say, so heinous is the nature of sin, and so dreadful the punishment annexed to it, that nothing less than an infinite Being could be able to support this wrath of God, or make adequate satisfaction to divine justice. On this supposition also they account for the agony of Christ in the garden and the bloody sweat, as likewise for his language upon the cross, when he said, "My God! my God! why hast thou forsaken me?" They imagine, that these strong expressions of distress proceeded from the sufferings, which God then inflicted upon him in a supernatural manner in lieu of those, which were appointed for sinners in another world. Nay, Calvin went so far as to say, that nothing would have been done by the mere death of Christ, if he had not also afterward descended into Hell, where he sustained that death, which is inflicted by an angry God on the wicked.

But here it natnrally occurs to ask; could God suffer? could God die? If that be impossible, since it would be to suppose him a man like ourselves, where is the infinite Being to make infinite satisfaction for the infinite evil there is in sin, and to bear the whole weight of the wrath of God, as they express it? There is nothing left to bear pain and death but the man Christ Jesus. And can the sufferings of a man during a few hours (if we limit those of Christ to the time spent in the garden or upon the cross, as is usually done) or during a few days (if with Calvin we suppose Christ went into Hell, while his body lay in the grave) be equal to all the sufferings of the elect throughout an eternal duration? How much less equal to the sufferings destined for all mankind, which some suppose Christ endured?

Besides, vicarious punishment, or punishment instead of another, is a thing in it's own nature impossible. If I owe a sum of money, which I am not able to pay, a friend may pay it for me; but if I have merited punishment by my conduct, no one can suffer that punishment in my place, even should he offer to do it; for punishment implies guilt, which is a personal thing and cannot be transferred. It is impossible, therefore, that Christ should suffer the punishment due to mankind on account of their sins. The same thing may be proved respecting his obedience, which is said to be imputed to sinners that are justified. A man may obey a law for himself, but cannot obey it for another; for obedience,

as well as guilt, implies something personal, which cannot be transferred. You see, then, what the boasted comfort and dependence of some persons are reduced to: they rely upon the obedience of Christ for supplying their own want of obedience, and upon his punishment for supplying the place of theirs; that is, upon a thing which is impossible.

The great plea for the doctrine of the atonement is; that it is necessary to vindicate the divine justice, that, when an offence has been committed, punishment must be inflicted somewhere, and if not upon the offender, upon some other person. But there is no principle of justice we are acquainted with, that requires this: on the contrary, it is an invariable maxim of law among men, that the guilty alone ought to suffer, and that no punishment ought to be inflicted upon the innocent, even were they voluntarily to offer to submit to it. Let us suppose a case of a man, who is brought into a court of justice for an offence against the law, such as theft or murder, and that the crime is fully proved against him. If a third person were to step forward and say; it is true, that my friend here has been guilty of the crime laid to his charge, and deserves all the punishment, which the law in such cases appoints; but such is my affection for him, that I am willing to bear it for him; punish me in his place—would such an offer be accepted? No; certainly not. The judge would tell him, that the design of punishment was, by making the offender suffer, to prevent others

from committing the like crime, which end could not be answered by inflicting it upon an innocent person; that on the contrary it would rather tend to encourage crimes than prevent them, if persons were allowed to suffer punishment for the guilty, and hereby to enable them to escape justice. Such would be the light, in which such an offer would be viewed in a court of justice. And can God approve and accept of the punishment of the innocent for the guilty, as calculated to promote in the best manner the ends of justice, when men reject it as tending to defeat those ends? Will inflicting the punishments of Hell due to sinners upon his innocent son convince men of the evil of sin, or deter them from the practice of it?

Where a man knows that by a particular conduct of his he may expose a friend to pain, he may be restrained from doing that, which he knows would be the cause of suffering to one that is dear to him. But when a friend has endured, several hundred years ago, all that he can suffer on my account (as is supposed to be the case with respect to Christ), and no fresh sins that I can commit can add to the number or weight of his sufferings, I can feel myself under no restraint from tenderness to that friend; for I can do him no further injury. Nay, it would relieve me from no small obstacle to my transgressions, which I find lying in my way at present, if I could be assured that the future punishment annexed to my sins, and about which I am so alarmed,

is already borne by another, and that, let me do whatever I may be inclined to do, I cannot add to his burden; for I now perceive that I can sin at free cost, without doing any injury to myself, or my friend Christ Jesus. As to God, his justice is already satisfied by the sufferings of his son, for whatever sinners have done, or may do. Thus we find, that this scheme, which is held up to our admiration as a model of wisdom for preventing crimes, appears, in fact, to afford the greatest encouragement to the commission of them, and, instead of exalting the divine justice in our estimation, tends to degrade it.

The idea which it gives of the divine Being is that of a furious man, who, having received an injury, is about to punish the offender, but a friend interposing to prevent the execution of the design, he is induced to forego the pleasure of reeking his vengeance on the guilty, on condition of being allowed to pour forth his wrath upon the head of this friend.

But it should be remembered that the justice of God is not a blind principle, which seizes and punishes whatever offers itself, but that it is a modification of benevolence, and has nothing in view except the happiness of individuals, or of society, inflicting punishments only where they are necessary, to prevent the repetition of actions which may prove injurious to the persons who commit them, or to mankind in general. But where men repent of their

ill conduct and reform it, there is evidently no occasion for the exercise of justice; for the ends of justice are already attained in another manner. To punish a penitent would be to inflict evil where it was not wanted, and could answer no useful purpose. To do this cannot exalt our opinion of the Almighty, or recommend him to our esteem. On the contrary, it would lead us to regard him as actuated by revenge, which must sink and degrade his character; while forgiveness has something in it that is noble and generous, which attracts the affection of every one.

There are many persons who can by no means think that God has, in a proper sense, accepted of the death of Christ in lieu of that of all men, having no idea of the possibility of transferring guilt, and consequently of transferring punishment, who yet think, that the death of Christ serves to show the divine displeasure at sin in such a manner, as that it would not have been expedient to pardon any sin without it. But the divine displeasure against sin is sufficiently manifested by the expensive means which he has employed to reform men from it, and especially by the evils which he inflicts upon those who still remain unreformed. If those who persist in a sinful course expose themselves to many evils here, and to losses in a future state, which it is impossible to estimate, these are sufficient marks of the divine pleasure, and enough to deter all wise men from pursuing a like conduct.

There are others who find themselves obliged to give up the idea of Christ dying as a sacrifice for sin, or in our stead, who say, nevertheless, that God forgives the sins of men for the sake of the merits, or at the intercession of Christ, and that this appears to be analogous to the divine conduct in other respects; as God is said to show favour to some on the account of others, and especially to have separated the Israelites on account of their relation to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and their posterity plead the merit of these their religious ancestors in their prayers. God is also represented as ready to forgive the people of Sodom at the intercession of Abraham, provided there were so many righteous persons found in the place.

It is not denied, that it may be consistent with the maxims of the divine government to show favour to some persons on account of others, to whom they bear a near relation: it is a wise maxim in human governments; because we are, in many cases, as much concerned for others as for ourselves, and therefore a favour to a man's children and posterity may be the proper reward of his own merit, and also answer other ends of a reward, by being a motive to other persons to behave well.

But favours bestowed in this manner were of a temporal and national kind, and related to the possession of the land of Canaan, or to being delivered from certain national calamities, and not to the possession of Heaven, or deliverance from future mi-

sery. Individuals are never assured that all their sins would be forgiven them on account of the merit of their ancestors, although God is represented as forgiving bodies of men in particular cases on this principle. Nor in public national affairs did a regard to it extend far; for, whenever the Jews incurred actual guilt, they were always punished, like other people, and by no means spared on account of their relation to Abraham. Nay, they are often said to be more severely punished for not improving their privileges as his descendants.

Had Sodom been spared at the intercession of Abraham, and for the sake of ten righteous persons found in it, would that have implied that every individual in that corrupt city was brought into a state of acceptance with God, and qualified for entering upon future happiness? Or is it not rather evident, that the whole benefit of his or their merit would have extended no further than to deliver them from certain temporal judgments, and would have had no relation to future punishments?

In like manner it may be admitted, that Christ, by his great merit in dying for the benefit of mankind, may have obtained from God the honour and privilege of conferring upon the Gentiles the blessings of the Gospel, and of hereby removing the marks of divine displeasure, under which they before laboured; but this is a very different thing from what is pleaded for by the advocates for the atonement, who maintain, that every sin is pardoned, and

the evil effects of it removed, both in respect to this world and the next, and every blessing we enjoy bestowed, for the sake of what Christ did or suffered. In the one case Christ, like other good men, is made the instrument, in the hand of God, on account of his extraordinary merit, of conferring upon us particular privileges and advantages, which yet God might have bestowed without any regard to Christ; in the other, we are supposed to receive every thing that can be deemed most valuable by a rational being, deliverance from eternal misery, and the possession of eternal life, on account of the merits of Christ alone; and we are told, that it is not consistent with the perfections of the divine Being to grant them in any other way.

I have now considered the supposed atonement of Christ in two points of view, as the payment of a debt, and as the suffering of punishment due to others for their sins, and in both views we have found it dishonourable to the divine perfections, or inconsistent with the obvious principles of reason and justice. In the former case, when his death is considered as the payment of a debt, it takes away entirely the exercise of mercy; in the latter, it represents the great Father of mankind as punishing the innocent for the guilty, which is in itself unjust, and can answer no other purposes than those of degrading the divine character, and inducing men to make light of sin, the certain consequences of which are borne by another.

It is still necessary to explain certain phrases, which occur in Scripture, and which have been supposed to countenance this pernicious opinion. This subject, together with some general reflections and observations on the questions that have been discused, and on the general design I have in view, including in all two lectures, will occupy all the time I have allotted to myself the present season.

I shall conclude at present with two observations. The first is, that those who persist in rejecting the doctrine of the atonement, and rely upon the promises of pardon upon repentance alone, have as good ground for comfort as those, who rely upon the merit and death of Christ: for what have the latter to depend upon but the declarations of God, that he will accept of the sacrifice of Christ, and, in consequence of what he has suffered, forgive their sins; since it belongs to him alone to prescribe on what terms he will receive offenders into his favour again; and it is not pretended, that this doctrine of atonement is so obvious and natural, that it would occur to the thoughts independently of divine declarations? The hopes of the one rest, then, upon the promises of God, and upon the same ground are the hopes of the other built likewise; for those believe, that Jesus Christ has authorised us to expect, that our sins will be forgiven upon repentance and reformation alone, and that God commissioned him to give us this expectation. What better foundation can there be for peace and comfort than this? Are

declarations of the original love and goodness of God less worthy of our regards, or are the promises of God of less value, because they are brought by one of the human race, if he be sufficiently proved to be a messenger from God? When we are taught to consider God as a father, who sent to save the world, because he loved the world, cannot we trust him? when we are assured in the name of God, that he will forgive the trespasses of those, that truly repent and forsake their sins, cannot we believe the assurance? Why, then, should men overlook the solemn promises of one, who cannot lie, who is disposed of his own free love and mercy to pardon penitent sinners, and choose rather to rely upon a supposed satisfaction made to his justice, which, in whatever light it may be viewed, is attended with insuperable difficulties? Or why should it be thought, that one system of faith is destitute of comfort, when it leaves them in full possession of that ground, which is on all hands allowed to be universally the foundation of it?

The second is, that the doctrine of forgiveness, as has been before stated, is plain and simple, and agreeable to the general tenour of Scripture—circumstances, which plead strongly in it's favour, when, as it appears, the contrary doctrine of being forgiven for the sake of another, beside being contradicted by many express passages of Scripture, is irrational and absurd, we ought to be very careful how we admit it upon the authority of particular texts.

It is certainly a great satisfaction to entertain such an idea of the author of the universe and of his moral government, as is consonant to the dictates of reason and the tenour of revelation in general, and also to leave as little obscurity in the principles of our faith as possible, that the articles of our creed on this great subject may be few, clear, and simple. Now it is certainly the doctrine of reason as well as of the Old Testament, that God is merciful to the penitent, and that nothing is requisite to make men in all situations the object of his favour, but such moral conduct as he has made them capable of.

This is a simple and a pleasing view of God and of his moral government, and the consideration of it cannot but have the best effect on the temper of our minds and our conduct in life. The general tenour of the New Testament is likewise plainly agreeable to this view of things; and none of the facts recorded in it require to be illustrated by any other principles. In this, then, let us acquiesce, not doubting, though perhaps not at present, we shall in time be able without any effort or straining to explain all *particular* expressions in the apostolic writings, in a manner perfectly consistent with *the general strain* of their own writings and the rest of the Scriptures.

SERMON XXXII.

ON THE LANGUAGE APPLIED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT TO THE DEATH OF CHRIST.

1 JOHN ii, 1, 2.

And if any Man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the Propitiation for our Sins; and not for ours only, but also for the Sins of the whole World.

IN the third discourse, which I delivered to you on the subject of the atonement, I endeavoured to show you what was the design and use of the atonements of the Mosaic law, from which the modern doctrine we are considering derives so much countenance and support; and it clearly appeared that they were not intended to remove moral guilt, since they were not appointed for cases of wilful violations of the moral law, but for removing certain incapacities, which unfitted the person who laboured under them for appearing in the presence of God in the tabernacle, in company with the other children of Israel. "The soul, that did aught presumptuously," was to be cut off, and no atonement admitted for him; it was only for sins of ignorance, which have in them nothing of moral turpitude, or

the lowest degree of it, that they were accepted, except in two cases of injustice, where, however, a compensation was required for the injury received, before the atonement could be admitted. Hence it was inferred, that the purpose of these atonements was to preserve the intercourse between God and his people in public worship, by removing such disqualifications, as rendered them unfit to appear before the visible manifestation of his glorious presence.

But the manner of religious worship established by Christ is very different from that, which was instituted by Moses. The Jews were allowed to worship God publicly in one place only; but Christians may worship him every where. Under this spiritual and universal constitution of religion there is no propriety in, or room for, ordinances relating to ceremonial impurities or corporal defilement, such as those, which rendered the Jews unfit to appear before the symbol of the divine presence, or in the courts of the majesty of God, nor for either stated or occasional atonements to be made for like purposes as those, by which the Jews were restored to, or confirmed in, the privileges and right of attending on public worship under the law. Agreeably to the spiritual genius and purposes of the Gospel, we are taught, that spiritual impurities only, *i. e.* evil dispositions and wicked practices, render us defiled, and unacceptable in the sight of God: and with regard even to these spiritual de-

filements, Christians are not cut off by them from their relation to God, or privilege of worshipping him; but upon a spiritual purification, *i. e.* upon repentance and amendment, and the cultivation of better dispositions, particularly of meekness, mercifulness, and forgiveness of those who have injured us, we are encouraged and taught to hope for the forgiveness of our sins.

Jesus Christ, having in compliance with the will of God voluntarily offered himself to death, was rewarded for this act of obedience by being authorised and enabled to publish the Gospel, containing these spiritual and gracious principles, to all the world, to Gentiles as well as Jews, and to unite them into one church and kingdom under his own administration. Hence it is, that the apostle compares Jesus Christ to the Jewish high priest, and the services performed by him in publishing the Gospel, which allows us free access to God at all times, to those performed by that minister in making atonement for the people; for the Jewish high priest was the minister, by whom the people, when duly qualified according to the law, held communion with and worshipped God, by whom they presented their offerings to him with acceptance, and derived favour and blessings from him; and Christ performs for us the like services, by giving us a religion which admits us to worship God at all times. It is on this ground, that Christ has bestowed upon us this privilege by the Gospel, that the apostles likewise

encourage us to come with confidence to God in prayer. Thus the writer to the Hebrews says; (x, 19—25), " Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say, his flesh, and having a high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water." They also draw hence an argument for encouraging our stedfastness in the profession of the Gospel, and diligence and comfort in religious worship according to the institutions of the Gospel; for the same writer adds immediately, " let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering (for he is faithful that promised), and let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is." In another part of this epistle, chap. xiii, 15, after having stated, that Jesus has sanctified us with his blood, in the same manner as the children of Israel were sanctified or consecrated for the worship of God by the blood of the sin offering, he says, " By him, therefore, let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually," that is, the fruit of our lips, " giving thanks to his name:" where we find the apostle deduces an exhortation to diligence in performing religious worship in his name from

the representation of him, as having made atonement for us with his own blood.

This manner of representing the unrestrained liberty which is granted to us to assemble together at any time, in any place, and under any circumstances, to offer unto God the spiritual sacrifices of prayer and praise, which alone are required from us, in the name of our great high priest, who appeareth always in the presence of God for us, was well calculated to make a deep impression on the minds and hearts of the Jews, to whom the epistle to the Hebrews was addressed, and to recommend so gracious a constitution to their thankful acceptance. For they had felt severely the inconveniences of being confined to one place of solemn congregation for religious worship, the trouble and expense of being obliged to assemble there from all parts of the country, and even of the earth; the costliness of the sacrifices, the many circumstances which excluded them from the house of God, and the charge of the atonements required to restore them to a capacity of attending there.

With like allusions to the sacrifical atonements appointed to cleanse the people from these defilements, which rendered them unfit to appear before God, to the ministration of the high priest in the holy place for that purpose, and to the recovery and confirmation to them of the privilege of partaking in the public services of the tabernacle, the apostle John also expresseth the full and uninterrupted

liberty of holding communion or fellowship with the Father, the Son, and the whole church of Christ, and the removal of all incapacities for that purpose, arising from any sins already committed, which is granted to all penitent sinners by the Gospel, which is published to the world in consequence of the death of Christ; 1 John i, 3. "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." Here he glories in the privilege which he enjoyed as a Christian, of conversing with God, and of being ranked in the same society with Jesus Christ; and again, v. 7, "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanseth us from all sin." Under the law of Moses, there were various things which excluded them from the tabernacle, and therefore prevented them from having society in public worship with one another; but under the Gospel there was nothing to cause their exclusion from the society of Christians in public worship. Even their sins would not exclude them from this principle; for the blood of Christ, for shedding which he was rewarded with the honour of publishing the Gospel, removed every disqualification which could arise from that source, and answered hereby every purpose that could be attained by the blood of the sin offerings under the law. He refers probably to the same subject, when he

says, v. 9, "if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness," meaning thereby, that if we confess our sins to God, he will forgive them, and regard us as purified from every thing, that would unfit us for conversing with him.

I have insisted at considerable length upon this subject, because I think the observations now made will serve to explain the design of the apostle John, in the text, which has been considered as the strongest language in favour of the common doctrine of the atonement of any passage in the New Testament: "If any man sin," says the apostle, "we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the propitiation, or (as the word might properly be rendered) *atonement* for our sins, but not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world, *i. e.* according to the interpretation of the advocates for this doctrine, be not concerned about the guilt you have contracted by your sins; for Jesus Christ, having suffered the penalties of the law upon the cross, and hereby made atonement for you, now intercedes with God for your forgiveness—an intercession, which cannot fail to be successful, since he only asks for that, which is already due to him by previous compact, for he suffered death upon the cross upon condition, that his sufferings should be accepted in lieu of those of transgressors.

But the observations just made will enable us to explain this passage, without having recourse to the

doctrine of vicarious punishment, which is so inconsistent with every principle of equity. The apostle still alludes to the atonements made under the Mosaic law by the high priest for those, who were admitted to worship God in the tabernacle, and shows, that Christ performed the same service for Christians, that the high priest of the Jews could do for them. We have no occasion now to be afraid, that our sins should exclude us from the worship of God, "for if any one sin," says he, "we have an advocate," or (more properly) a *comforter* (παρακλητος, a person, who affords us consolation in regard to our offences) "with the Father," one who is in the presence of God (as the Jewish high priest was in the presence of God in the tabernacle), who has performed for us by his Gospel all that that minister performed for the Jews; "and he is the propitiation or *atonement* for our sins," he has by his Gospel assured us of pardon for our offences, and procured us free access to God, and hereby answered the purpose of an atonement; "but not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world;" he has answered the purposes of an atonement not to us Jews only, (for John was one of that nation) but to all mankind, who will accept of the privilege, for all are now permitted to worship God without the intervention of the ceremonies of the Mosaic law. In this manner this passage may be explained, in perfect consistence with the primary or subordinate ends, which Christ is said to have answered by his death. Similar language is used by

this apostle, ch. iv, 10, and may be explained in the same way, "herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his son to be the propitiation, or *atonement* for our sins," *i. e.* by means of his death to publish to us all the glad tidings of remission of sins upon repentance, and hereby to answer the ends of the atonements of the law, by admitting us all into one society with himself and with his church, in the same manner as the high priest admitted those, who laboured under ceremonial uncleannesses, into the congregation of Israel in the tabernacle, after he had made atonement for them. These two passages are the only passages in the New Testament, where Christ is called an atonement or propitiation; and it now appears, that he is only called so by way of allusion to the atonements of the law as answering a similar purpose.

There are, however, other passages of Scripture, which, although they do not directly assert, that Christ was a sacrifice for sin and made atonement, yet, as is asserted, perfectly correspond with that idea, and agree with no other view of the death of Christ. These I shall now consider in general, without examining each particular passage. Thus, first, Christ is said to have died for us, for his sheep, for all, for many, for our offences, for the ungodly, to give himself for us, to have suffered for us, to shed his blood for many, to die for the people, for the weak brother, for the church, to taste death for every man, to suffer for sin, for the unjust. It is

evident, that the meaning of these passages must depend upon the sense given to the particle *for*, which is ambiguous; for it may mean *instead of*, *in lieu of*, or only on *account of*, *for the good of*. When therefore Christ is said to have died for, or laid down his life for, or shed his blood for us, for many, &c., it may be perfectly consistent with the account already given of the great design of the death of Christ, that it was to exemplify the doctrine of a resurrection; for these expressions may very well be understood to signify for our good, a purpose, which he must certainly have had in view, if he died with the design just mentioned. In general, then, this language may be interpreted of his dying on our account, or for our benefit." How easy is it upon this supposition to explain such passages as the following; John x, 11, "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep;" ch. xv, 13, "greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends;" 1 Peter iii, 18, "Christ hath once suffered for sin, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God;" John xi, 50, "It is expedient for us, that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not."

A shepherd, in risking his life for his sheep, evidently gives his life for theirs, in a proper sense; because if he had not thrown himself in the way of the wild beasts, that were rushing upon his sheep, they must have died. But here was no *compact* between the beasts and the shepherd: the blood of

the sheep was not *due* to them; nor did they accept of the shepherd in it's stead. This case is, therefore, no proper parallel to the death of Christ on the principle of the doctrine of the atonement, although it may serve the purpose of a simile to illustrate the benevolence of Christ in dying for the benefit of mankind, in whatever manner we suppose their welfare to be promoted by his death.

Secondly, Christ is said to have given his life a ransom for us, that is, according to some, he paid an equivalent price to the justice of God for the release of sinful men from those penalties, to which they were become obnoxious by transgressing his law, in the same manner as a person may pay a price in money for the release of a captive, a slave, or criminal; Mat. xx, 28, "Even as the son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many;" Mark x, 45, where the same words are repeated. These are the only two passages in which the word λύτρον is applied to the death of Christ, and it would have been better rendered a *release* or *deliverance* for many; for it does not appear that Christ had in his mind any idea of a price paid in money, or in any other form. He was cautioning his disciples not to affect external dignity and authority among themselves, but exhorts them rather to aspire to that superiority, which arises from greater humility and usefulness, and proposes his own example, "even as the son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister,"

i. e. to save mankind by reforming them from their sins; he adds, "and to give his life a deliverance or release for many," *i. e.* to deliver many; as if he had said, I came to prosecute by my death that, which was the great object of my life, the reformation of the world; for my death will prove an excellent expedient to rescue men from the dominion of sin. Here again we see how Christians are misled by interpreting figurative passages literally. The death of Christ agrees very well with the idea of a ransom, in as much as it is the means of deliverance like a ransom; but if we endeavour to make the comparison hold in every particular, we are led into a variety of mistakes.

We have an expression similar to this, although not exactly the same, in 1 Tim. ii, 6; "Who gave himself a ransom (ἀντίλυτρον, not λύτρον) for all," where the sense must be the same, as in the preceding passage. We meet also with another similar expression; Tit. ii, 14, "Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify to himself a peculiar people zealous of good works," *i. e.* that he might deliver us from subjection to iniquity or from the practice of it, but not by paying a ransom for us to iniquity, but by the preaching of the Gospel, by expedients of wisdom and power. So we read, 1 Pet. i, 18, "For as much as ye know, that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious

blood of Christ"—not as a ransom or price, but as a proper expedient to effect such redemption or deliverance; not from the justice of God or the penalties due to former transgressions, but from a state of subjection to sin, from a vain conversation, as it is here expressed.

In this passage the price of redemption is said to have been given by Christ, but in general the price of our redemption is said to have been given by God; John iii, 16, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life; Rom. viii, 32, "He that spared not his own son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

This language on the part of God or Christ is very proper considered as figurative; for nothing but the mission of Christ could have saved the world, and his death was the necessary consequence of his undertaking it. God is said very properly to have given him for us; or, since he undertook the work voluntarily, and from the love which he bore to man, he also may be said to have given his life as a ransom for ours; and thus these texts come under the same general idea with those explained before. In a figurative sense the Gospel may be said to be the most expensive provision, that God has made from recovering men from the power of sin, in as much as it required greater exertions of wisdom and power in the bestowment of miraculous gifts;

and he may be said thus to purchase men, as it were, for himself.

The above passages, which represent God as paying the ransom for mankind, afford a plain proof, that the language is to be considered as figurative, and that the death of Christ is only like a ransom in some respects and not in all; for *God* pays the ransom. Is he to pay it to himself? That is inconsistent with the idea of a ransom. The early fathers indeed said, that the ransom was paid to the devil; but I suppose, that no one in the present day will adopt this idea, that Jesus Christ died to satisfy the demands of the devil, and thereby to deliver men from his power.

Thirdly, Christ is said to bear the sins of men: Is. liii, 11, "He shall bear their iniquity;" v. 12, "He bore the sins of many;" 1 Pet. ii, 24, "Who his own self bore our sins in his own body on the tree;" Heb. ix, 28, "Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many," *i. e.* according to the opinion of the advocates for the atonement, he bore the evils, which were due to us on account of our transgressions; but the idea we ought to annex to the phrase *bearing sin*, as we have already shown, is that of bearing it away, or removing it—an effect, which is produced by the power of the Gospel. These texts, therefore, are similar to 1 John iii, 5, "And ye know, that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin." The phrase *bearing*

sin is never applied under the law, except to the scape goat, on the day of expiation, which was not sacrificed, but (as the name expresses) was turned out into the wilderness.

Some may suppose the doctrine of the atonement to be countenanced by Jesus Christ's being called a *mediator*, as if that term necessarily implied, that he had suffered something on our account, and was employed in pleading the merits of those sufferings in order to induce the divine Being to show mercy to mankind. But this must arise entirely from the idea being early associated with the term, and not from the word itself; for a mediator signifies a person, who, by the consent of two or more adverse parties, interposes, or acts as a reconciler, between the parties at variance. Christ is styled a mediator only by the apostle Paul; he is not once mentioned by that character in the four Gospels, or by any others of the sacred writers of the New Testament; 1 Tim. ii, 5, "There is one God, and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus." The parties at variance are supposed by Paul to be God and a sinful world, and Christ is a mediator between both by declaring the mind and will of God in the Gospel, which is the rule of reconciliation, II Cor. v, 19. The same apostle says, "that God was in (or by) Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." That this passage had no particular reference to the sufferings of Christ, and to their qualifying him in

a peculiar manner for performing this office, is evident from his calling Moses, who delivered the law, a mediator, Gal. iii, 19; "The law was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator," who was Moses. In reference to this circumstance Christ is called the mediator of a better covenant, and of a new covenant, in the same manner as Moses was mediator of the old. The only reason, then, why Christ is called a mediator is, because he is employed to declare and to deliver his will to mankind, which will is the true and only medium of our reconciliation to God. He herein exercises an office, which is common to him with Moses and other prophets.

It should be still remembered, however, that it is only in a figurative sense that either Christ or Moses can be called a mediator; for there is a very observable difference between them and other mediators among men. Christ acted from God, as God's minister, between him and sinful men; other mediators are agents, or ministers, from a third party, between two other parties. Christ offers from God, the one party, his whole terms, or scheme of reconciliation; other mediators propose to each of the two contending parties their several demands, and often retract and abate the terms of one or both parties. But the terms of God, offered by Christ, cannot admit of any abatement or alteration, but were to be accepted as the wise and gracious terms of God, considered as a governor treating with his disloyal subjects.

The doctrine of the atonement has been supposed to be countenanced by the agony of Christ in the garden. He felt greater depression of mind at the prospect of crucifixion than many of his followers have shown in like circumstances, which, it is said, must be attributed to the evils which God then inflicted upon him, in a supernatural manner, for our sins. But the whole of what our Lord felt upon this occasion may be accounted for upon the principles of human nature, without supposing any miracle, if we reflect how much men usually suffer from the prospect of violent pain, and how greatly the sufferings of Christ must have been aggravated by the long previous knowledge which he had of all the dreadful circumstances of his death. The prospect of common evils, such as bodily pain, is very distressing, and frequently much harder to be borne than the actual pain itself; but those which Christ had in view possessed every thing that was dreadful; he knew that he was to be publicly insulted, nailed alive to a cross, exposed naked upon it for several hours to public view, in company with malefactors who deserved so painful and ignominious a death. Not to have been distressed at such a prospect would have argued either gross stupidity, or something superior to human nature. To have been distressed at it in so high a degree, is to be attributed to his having had a distinct knowledge of his death communicated to him, accom-

panied with all it's dreadful circumstances twelve months before.

Where violent bodily pain is to be endured, the longer men know of it before, the more do they suffer from the apprehension; for every time they think of it, their feelings must rise to a higher degree of acuteness, as to receive a blow upon a part already sore increases the pain. In this manner, by foreseeing his death, and frequently thinking upon what he was to suffer, for so long a period beforehand, were the feelings of Christ increased to that agony of distress which we see him suffering in the garden. This account is rendered probable, by observing that he frequently foretold his own crucifixion, and that the prospect of it appeared to make a strong impression upon his mind at an early period. Long before the event, he says, "I have a baptism to be baptised with, and how am I straitened (or pained) until it be accomplished!" Luke xii, 50.—And, on another occasion, within a few days of his death—"Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? but for this cause came I unto this hour;" John xii, 27. These passages show, that Christ looked forward to his death for some time with painful apprehension. These apprehensions must be continually increasing as the event was approaching; and when he was in the garden, and knew that he was about to be apprehended, they were at the height, and produced those

violent emotions which are described in the evangelists.

As to the sins of others, it is natural to suppose that his mind would be less at leisure to attend to them than at any other time, being necessarily occupied with the sense of his own sufferings; and accordingly we find, that all he says upon that occasion respects himself only: "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." That the presence of God forsook him, whatever be meant by it, is not at all supported by fact; and when he was oppressed with sorrow, an angel was sent to comfort and strengthen him.

He went through the scene of his crucifixion with wonderful composure, and without the least appearance of any thing like agony of mind. His saying, "my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" was probably nothing more than his repeating the first verse of the twenty-second Psalm, to which he might wish to direct the attention of those who were present, as it contained many things peculiarly applicable to his case. There is nothing in this scene, any more than his agony in the garden, but what is easily explicable upon the supposition of Christ being a man: indeed every thing concurs to favour this supposition; and to assert, that he was then under any agony of mind, impressed upon him in any inexplicable manner by the immediate hand of God, in order to aggravate what he would naturally suffer,

and thereby make his sufferings an adequate expiation for the sins of the world, is a mere arbitrary assumption, not countenanced by any one circumstance in the narration.

I have now finished what I proposed by showing you the great design for which Christ died, and by explaining those figurative and other representations of his death, which have been supposed to prove, that he died to satisfy divine justice, and to incline the merciful parent of mankind to forgive the offences of his offspring. Nothing now remains but to make a few inferences from the subject, which I must reserve for another opportunity.

SERMON XXXIII.

INFERENCES FROM THE FALSEHOOD OF THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST'S ATONEMENT.

JOHN xvi, 26, 27.

At that Day ye shall ask in my Name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you; for the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God.

HAVING now finished what I proposed to deliver upon the doctrine of the atonement, I shall briefly recapitulate what I have said upon the subject, in order to prove, that it is as inconsistent with Scripture as it is with reason, and then make some inferences from the subject. In the first discourse I endeavoured to shew, upon what terms God is represented in Scripture as receiving those into his favour, who had offended him. There it appeared, that all which God requires of men in the Old Testament is, that they should repent of their sins and reform their conduct, or, in the words of Scripture, that they should cease to do evil and learn to do well; that the wicked should forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts, for that then God would

have mercy upon them and abundantly pardon. It also appeared, that there were not any new terms of forgiveness prescribed in the New Testament; but that, on the contrary, the readiness of God to forgive sinners upon their repentance only was fully represented to us in the parable of the prodigal son, and by Christ's requiring us to forgive a brother, who has offended us, in the same manner as God forgives us. In the second discourse I endeavoured to show you the great design of the death of Christ, that it was in order to his rising again from the dead, and hereby affording us an example of a resurrection from the dead to eternal life, to establish his followers in the belief of that event by an indisputable fact; and that as the belief of a future state of rewards for good men would have the most powerful influence in inducing men to repent of and forsake their sins, these good effects may be justly attributed to the death of Christ; and that the strong language of Scripture, in ascribing so many moral benefits to the sufferings and death of Christ, may be accounted for upon this principle. I also showed you several other secondary purposes, which might be answered by the death of Christ. As the atonements of the law of Moses were supposed to prefigure the atonement of Christ, and to be of a similar nature, in the third discourse I examined their design, by considering the various cases in which they were appointed: from which it appeared, that, although they were called sin offerings and were said

to procure forgiveness, yet they had no relation to *wilful* offences, being admitted only in respect to sins of ignorance and certain cases of ceremonial uncleanness, and were evidently founded upon the idea of God having a visible and personal residence among the children of Israel as their king, for approaching whom, therefore, certain forms were necessary to be observed, as for approaching other monarchs. Between the death of Christ, which is supposed to satisfy divine justice, and such atonements, there could be no exact resemblance. Yet, in a figurative and less proper sense, the death of Christ might be said to make atonement, in as much as Christ voluntarily gave up his life upon the cross for our benefit, was rewarded with the honour of publishing the Gospel to the world, which Gospel admits all, notwithstanding their sins, to worship God in company with their fellow Christians, and hereby answers an end something like that of the atonements of the law. In the fourth discourse I endeavoured to explain the other figurative language, which is applied to the death of Christ, particularly that in which he is called a sacrifice, by showing, that the term might be applied to his death, in as much as he died for our benefit, but that the sacred writers never considered Christ as a *real* sacrifice. I further observed, that to apply the terms and phrases of the law of Moses to every thing which they found to bear any resemblance to it in Christianity, was

unavoidable in men who had been educated Jews, and to whom the ceremonies and language of that institution must have been perfectly familiar. In the fifth, I endeavoured to prove, that the supposed doctrine of the atonement was as inconsistent with reason and the divine perfections, as it was found to be without foundation in Scripture, whether the death of Christ be considered as the payment of a debt, or as the suffering punishment for the offences of others; for in the former case it leaves in the divine Being no room for the exercise of mercy, in the latter it is inconsistent with every idea of justice, in making the innocent to be punished for the guilty, and could therefore answer no useful purpose under the divine government. Lastly I showed you, in what sense Christ might be considered as a propitiation, a ransom, a mediator, and as dying for us, and that these views of his character were perfectly consistent with what had been laid down before as the great design of the life and death of Christ. The first inference I shall make hence is,

I. That it appears, that the doctrine of the atonement has no just foundation. For it has been shown to be inconsistent with the divine perfections, and directly contrary to the plainest declarations of Scripture respecting the manner in which God forgives sin: it has appeared also, that the language of Scripture, which has been supposed to countenance it, had been misunderstood, being taken literally when it ought to have been interpreted figuratively.

Nothing more than this can be necessary to prove any doctrine groundless and false. I could, however, have shown, that this doctrine was wholly unknown to the early Christians, and that it never was exactly defined in it's present form till the time of the reformation by Luther, when the controversies began about indulgences; for as, in order to promote the sale of indulgences, the church of Rome extolled the efficacy of good works, the reformers went into the opposite extreme in contending with their adversaries, disclaiming merit altogether, undervaluing all good works, and building all hopes of future happiness on the perfect satisfaction, that Christ had made to the justice of God for us, and upon his righteousness imputed to us. From this time the doctrine of atonement was reduced to a regular system, grounded upon certain principles and pursued to it's full extent; and from this time it has been maintained with great zeal by most Protestants, Lutherans as well as Calvinists, and been deemed to be one of the most important doctrines of revelation. So that it is in fact a modern doctrine and of very late date, which of itself would be a sufficient reason for rejecting it. But as the proof of this must be drawn from many quotations of ancient and modern authors, I thought that arguments founded upon reason and Scripture would be more satisfactory, and have, therefore, confined myself to them.

II. If the doctrine of the atonement be not true, it is improper to ask any favour of God *for Christ's sake.* For, if the divine Being be inclined to pardon sin and to bestow other blessings upon his rational creatures from his own good will, and independently of the merits of Christ, it is wrong to plead those merits in our addresses to him. Such language is in fact an affront to the divine Being by supposing, that he must be hired to do good by some valuable consideration offered to him by a third person; it represents him as a mercenary being, who will part with no favours until they are purchased and paid for by an equivalent, an idea, to which neither reason nor Scripture gives any countenance. The New Testament uniformly represents the mission of Christ and the blessings of the Gospel as proceeding from the love of God, and as bestowed freely: "being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus," Rom. iii, 24. There is one passage indeed, in which, according to our translation, God is said to forgive sin for the sake of Christ, Ephes. iv, 32, "Be ye kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you." But in the original it is ἐν Χριστῷ, nor can any passage be produced in the whole New Testament, in which the death of Christ is represented as the *cause*, *reason*, or motive, why any blessings are bestowed upon us.

Such expressions as the following, therefore, which occur in the close of the prayers in the public liturgy, are not authorised by Scripture, and must be improper, "grant this, O Lord, for the honour of our advocate and mediator, Jesus Christ;" "through the merits of Jesus Christ, our Saviour;" "for the love of thy only Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ," &c. Improper likewise are similar expressions with which dissenters, who believe the doctrine of the atonement, conclude their prayers, implying that they hope to be heard for Christ's sake.

It may be supposed, however, by some, that Christ's directing his disciples in the text to ask blessings of God in his name, and the practice of the apostles in offering up their addresses in his name imply, that God is disposed to bestow favours upon us only for the sake of Christ. This idea is likewise supposed to be further confirmed by Christ's being called our advocate, and being said to make intercession for us.

But praying in the name of Christ signifies no more, than praying as the disciples of Christ. Jesus says, Mark ix, 41. "For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink, in my name, "because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward;" where you see, that to give a cup of water to a person in the name of Christ is to give it to him as belonging to Christ, that is, as being his disciple. Accordingly in the parallel passage, Matt. x, 42, the same idea is thus expressed, "and who-

soever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only, in the name of a disciple," *i. e.* as a disciple, "verily I say unto you," &c. To offer prayers, then, to God in the name of Christ is to present them to him as his disciples, or as those who belong to Christ.

In concluding our prayers with declaring ourselves the disciples of Christ two things are implied, that we believe in Christ, and claim the privileges, which belong to those who hold that faith, and that we study to conform to the directions of Christ both in regard to our prayers and our general conduct. An Israelite might address God in the name of Abraham and of the other patriarchs, or in the name of Moses, and plead his title to the privileges, which God had promised in the revelations made to these different persons. In the same manner, a Christian, by addressing God in the name of Christ, professes his belief in the divine mission of Jesus Christ, and claims the privileges, which God has promised to such persons, particularly that of approaching God in prayer at all times and in every place. Jews could only worship God in the tabernacle or temple, and were prevented from approaching him there by a variety of ceremonial uncleannesses, which were to be removed by gifts and offerings. But under the Christian dispensation men are not confined to one place of worship, nor are they prevented from addressing the divine Being by their sins, provided they repent of them. By address-

ing God in the name of Christ, therefore, they may be considered as professing their faith in this gracious constitution, and as pleading it's provisions as a justification of their conduct. It is as if they said, we address thee, not as Gentiles so long rejected and unnoticed by thee, nor even as the children of Abraham or the disciples of Moses, but as those, who live under a better dispensation, which allows and encourages us to approach thee at all times.

Another thing implied in offering up our prayers to God as the disciples of Christ is, that we endeavour to conform ourselves to his directions, both in regard to our prayers and to our general conduct, and that we only expect to be heard so far as we do so. Christ has given his disciples several directions respecting prayer; teaching them for what they should pray, and with what temper of mind; as that they ought to seek spiritual blessings in preference to temporal, and the latter with moderate desires and with perfect submission to the divine will; that they ought to pray with a benevolent and forgiving temper, with humility, and with a firm confidence in the readiness of God to bestow what they ask. To say, that we pray as the disciples of Christ, is, therefore, to say, that we endeavour to conform to these directions of Christ, and only hope, that God will hear us so far as we pray with the spirit which becomes Christians. It likewise implies, that we endeavour to observe the

other rules of conduct, which Christ has given us; for it is an acknowledged maxim, that God heareth not sinners, and that it is not sufficient to call ourselves the disciples of Christ, unless we do the things which he hath commanded us. That something of this kind must be implied in praying in the name of Christ, is evident from the success which is promised to such prayers. Christ says, John xvi, 23, 24, "And in that day ye shall ask me nothing: verily, verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name; ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." Such unlimited assurances of success could only be founded upon the idea, that the persons making these requests were good Christians, and therefore fit objects of divine favour, and that the petitions they presented were agreeable to the directions of Christ and fit to be granted. Men of this character, who ask for nothing but what is lawful and good, will obtain the good things they ask for, or have what is equally valuable, self denial, and patience.

Notwithstanding that Christ directs his disciples to pray to God in his name, it does not appear, that it was always necessary to observe that form; for we find, that the apostles omitted it in several of their addresses to the divine Being, although in general they made use of it. The Apostle Paul says in his epistle to the Romans, 1, 8, "First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all,

that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world;" and xvi, 27, "To God only wise be glory through Jesus Christ for ever." In these instances his thanksgiving is addressed to God in the name of Christ; but in Tim. i, 17, omitting by or through Christ, he says, "now unto the king eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour &c.;" and Phil. iv, 20, "Now unto God even our father be glory" &c.; and Jude concludes his epistle with these words, "To the only wise God our Saviour be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen." We also find prayers addressed to God without being presented in the name of Christ: thus the apostle Paul says, 1 Thess. v, 23, "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly: and I pray God your whole spirit, and soul and body, be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." But in no instance do we find, that the apostles pray to God to grant them any thing for the sake of Christ.

With respect to the intercession of Christ there are two passages, which speak of him as performing that office, Rom. viii, 34; "Who is he that condemneth? it is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us;" Heb. vii, 24, 25, "But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the utmost (or rather for ever) that come to God by him, seeing he

ever liveth to make intercession for them." From these passages it has been inferred, that Jesus Christ is continually offering up prayers to God in behalf of Christians, and that they ought to pray to be heard on account of his prayers for them. But it has been observed, that the word we here render maketh intercession by no means necessarily implies making intercession by prayer, and that the general meaning of it is to do any act, which tends to reconcile parties at variance. It may, therefore, be applied to Jesus Christ in allusion to the office of high priest, whose business it was to introduce those into the presence of God, who had been excluded from it, and hereby to reconcile the parties to one another. A similar office Christ may be considered as performing for us by his Gospel.

That Christ, however, prays for his disciples, now he is in Heaven or in his exalted state, there can be no doubt, although it be not referred to in the above recited passages. It is what he would be naturally led to do, as wishing for the success of his Gospel in the world, and for the happiness of his disciples in general. It seems to be strongly implied in the text, where Christ says, "at that time," *i. e.* after my ascension, "ye shall ask in my name: and I say not, that I will pray the father for you," this I need not say, although I shall certainly do it; but he immediately adds what clearly proves, that his praying for them was not necessary to the success of their prayers, "for the Father himself loveth

you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God." So that here he asserts, that there would be no absolute necessity that he should pray the Father for them; for when they prayed in his name, as his disciples, God would hear them, though he did not intercede.

In regard to Christ being called our advocate I have already observed to you in the last discourse, that the word so rendered signifies also a comforter, and in this sense may only mean, that Jesus Christ, by living in the presence of God, affords us consolation, in as much as he has by his Gospel encouraged us to address God at all times, whatever our sins may have been, and hereby answered the same purpose, although in a far better manner, as the Jewish high priest, who introduced the people into the presence of God in the tabernacle, when atonement had been made for them: or, allowing that the word *advocate* is a proper translation, yet it does not necessarily imply intercession by prayer; it is a sufficient foundation for giving him that appellation, if in any way he serve us or promote our interests, for the same title is given to the holy spirit, and much more frequently than to Christ; although no one supposes that the holy spirit prays for us. Thus Christ calls the holy spirit the comforter, παρακλητος, the same word which is translated advocate when applied to Christ.

Thirdly, If Christ have not satisfied divine justice for our sins, we see what we have to trust to for-

acceptance with God, which is nothing more than the mercies of God and our own moral character.

No man can be so absurd as to pretend to offer to God sinless obedience, or claim a right to his favour upon that ground; for we must all see that we have sinned and stand in need of mercy; but if we repent of our sins and reform our conduct, we may securely rely upon this change for acceptance with a merciful and good Being. Thus to depend upon our own good works some persons may represent, as "leaning upon a broken reed," as "trusting to a refuge of lies," as "clothing ourselves with filthy rags," and apply to it much contemptuous language of the same kind; but it is enough for me, that this is all that God requires; if he be satisfied, who alone has a right to prescribe the terms on which he will receive us into his favour, it matters not who is displeased. It is enough for me, that the mercy of God or their own integrity is all, that the most eminent characters recorded in Scripture plead for their acceptance. If we have the same ground of hope which they had, we have no occasion for alarm, "Remember, O Lord," says David, Ps. xxv, 6, 7, "thy tender mercies, and thy lovingkindnesses; for they have been ever of old. Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions; according to thy mercy remember thou me, for thy goodness' sake, O Lord." And in another place, Ps. vii, 8, "Judge me, O Lord, according to my righteousness, and according to

mine integrity that is in me." King Hezekiah, in asking for longer life, prays in this manner; "I beseech thee, O Lord, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight." That such language could not be displeasing to the divine Being is evident from his prayer being heard, and fifteen years being added to his life. Nehemiah also mentioned his good works to God, and pleaded them as a reason for his hoping for favour; Neh. v, 19, "think upon me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people."

Such were the sentiments of these and many other worthies of the the Old Testament respecting the terms of acceptance with the divine Being; nor does it appear, that the opinion of Christ and his apostles upon this subject were at all different. To the many proofs I have already given of this I shall only add two. Christ pronounces those, who are possessed of particular moral virtues, those, for instance, who are poor in spirit, to be fit for the kingdom of Heaven, without any such cautions and restrictions as are added in the present day, giving us to understand, that these virtuous qualifications alone will not entitle a man to a place there; but that the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ are necessary to recommend him to the divine favour. And when a certain lawyer asked him, "what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" he said unto him, "what is written in the law; how readest thou? He

answering said, thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbour as thyself. And he said unto him, thou hast answered well, this do and thou shalt live." These two passages plainly show, that Christ had no idea, that any thing further was necessary to qualify us for the possession of eternal life than moral virtue, than the love of God and our neighbour, and the duties which necessarily result from these affections; for if he had thought any thing else necessary, he could not have failed to mention it, when applied to in this solemn manner.

The charge of errour and delusion may now be retorted upon those, who believe the doctrine of the atonement. They are the persons who undervalue good works, who trust to the merits and sufferings of Christ for salvation, who make their consciences easy in the practice of sin, while they depend upon his atonement and intercession, who trust to a false confidence and refuge of lies, and who, if they do not repent of their sins and work righteousness, will infallibly perish.

Fourthly, and lastly, If we be convinced that this doctrine is inconsistent with reason, dishonourable to the divine perfections, and has no foundation in Scripture, let us do every thing in our power to show other Christians their mistakes upon this subject, and to remove from the Christian religion so pernicious and disgraceful an errour.

This we are bound to do from a regard to our re-

ligion, which suffers much by it in the opinion of men of sense. When they find such a doctrine as this, so inconsistent with reason and every principle of equity, generally received by Christians, deemed also a fundamental principle essential to Christianity, the life and soul of the whole scheme, without which all the rest is a mere lifeless thing, without spirit or meaning, they are induced to reject the whole scheme, rather than receive it with such an incumbrance. In this they are certainly not justifiable; for they ought to examine for themselves in order to determine what Christianity contains, and not trust to the opinions of others. Yet the sentiments of the majority of Christians will always be regarded as the standard of Christianity by those, who are not disposed to give themselves the trouble of inquiring. A distinguished political writer, who has added nothing to his fame by writing against Christianity, but who certainly possesses much natural sagacity, thus speaks of the doctrine of redemption, by which he means the atonement; "the theory or doctrine of redemption has for it's basis an idea of *pecuniary* justice, and not that of *moral* justice. If I owe a person money, and cannot pay him, and he threatens to put me in prison, another person may take the debt upon himself and pay it for me; but if I have committed a crime, every circumstance in the case is changed. Moral justice cannot take the innocent for the guilty, even if the innocent would offer itself. To suppose justice to do this is to destroy the

principle of it's existence, which is the thing itself. It is then no longer justice, it is indiscriminate revenge."

Thus it is that he reasons, and so far very justly; but when he takes it for granted, that this is a doctrine of Christianity, and that the whole must be a fiction, he draws a conclusion from very insufficient premises. To such objections, however, our religion will always appear liable with all persons, who have not taken the trouble to examine it, while we retain this doctrine. Let us hasten, then, to rid it of such an incumbrance, and endeavour to convince all men that there is nothing in our religion that favours so irrational a theory.

We are called upon likewise to exert ourselves for this purpose from a regard to the peace and religious improvement of our fellow Christians, who, while they consider the Deity as not naturally inclined to show mercy, but induced to do it only by the sufferings and intercession of another, must regard him in an unamiable light, and destitute of that moral excellence, which secures the highest esteem. Such an idea of the great Parent of the universe must necessarily deprive them of those delightful prospects, which just views of his goodness naturally inspire, and fill their minds with gloom. It must likewise be remembered, that those, who are taught to believe, that God is willing to accept of the righteousness of Christ instead of their own, will be apt to regard good works as of little consequence, and so be in danger of falling into fatal negligence.

Whether therefore we regard the interests of Christianity, or those of our fellow Christians, we are required to do every thing in our power to remove this and every other pernicious errour, by instructing others with patience and diligence where we have opportunity, and especially by endeavouring to remove their prejudices against our opinions by an unexceptionable and exemplary conduct. Nor must we give up our endeavours in despair, if they be not immediately attended with success; for the doctrine of the trinity and that of the atonement are the most deeply rooted, and therefore the most difficult to be eradicated of all the corruptions of Christianity. It will probably require much time and many exertions to remove them.

Having finished what I proposed to deliver upon this subject, I cannot better express my design in these discourses, or my future wishes respecting you, than by adopting the apostle's words, when he says to the Thessalonians, "that he ceases not to desire, that they might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, that they might walk worthily of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God." Amen.

SERMON XXXIV.

ON THE NECESSITY OF PROVIDING A SUBSISTENCE FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTORS.

1 COR. ix, 14.

Even so hath the Lord ordained, that they, who preach the Gospel, should live of the Gospel.

IN these words the apostle Paul asserts the claim, which those, who were commissioned to preach the Gospel in his time, had to a maintenance. He declares, that it is founded upon the highest authority, upon the appointment of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Master, in regard to all religious matters. When he asserted this, he referred to what Jesus said to his disciples when he sent them out to preach during his life time, in order to prepare them for a more extensive service of the same kind when he was gone. On that occasion he enjoined, that they should take with them none of those things, which men usually provide for a journey, but should trust for subsistence and the expenses of travelling to the justice or generosity of those, who should think themselves benefitted by their labours. "Heal the sick," says he, "cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons; freely ye have received, freely

give." These acts of power you are to perform gratis, without receiving any fee or reward, because you have acquired the ability to perform them without any expense of yours. When Christ thus prohibited his disciples from taking any reward for performing miraculous cures, he was aware, that it would immediately occur to the minds of the apostles, that they must furnish themselves with all kind of provision for such a journey, at least with money, with which every thing might be purchased. To anticipate this thought he immediately tells them, that they were to give themselves no concern about any of these things: "provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, nor scrip for your journey," (a bag in which it was usual to carry such things as might be wanted for travelling), "neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves;" and adds this reason for it; "for the workman is worthy of his meat," (where meat must signify not merely food, but the necessaries of life, food, clothing, lodging, or the articles before specified) meaning, that the common principles of justice would induce mankind to furnish them with these necessaries, in the same manner as they are induced to give the means of subsistence to the workmen, the benefit of whose labours they enjoy.

From the words of the text I shall take occasion to inquire,

I. Upon what ground the apostles, or first

preachers of the Gospel, were entitled to a maintenance;

II. How far the preachers of the Gospel in the present day are entitled to a like support; and then conclude with making some inferences.

We are first to consider upon what ground the apostles were entitled to a maintenance. The apostles were persons, who had attended Jesus Christ during his life time, and who were commissioned by him to communicate the knowledge of his religion to mankind after his death, by laying before them the history of his life and the doctrines which he taught. For this purpose they were not to confine themselves to that slow method of teaching Christianity, which might have been employed by remaining at home, and instructing those, who came to hear them; but they were to visit the different towns and villages in Judæa, and even to travel into foreign counties in every quarter of the known world, to carry to all men the glad tidings of salvation, and to bring them even to their doors. The business, in which they were employed, was not calculated solely or principally for their own profit, to promote their own private interest, but chiefly if not entirely for the profit of others. They were prepared to make men acquainted with a revelation of the will of God, to furnish them with a perfect rule of moral conduct, to give them the clearest evidence of a future life of rewards and punishments, and hereby to afford the strongest motives for a

virtuous life, and the best foundation for comfort, which it was possible for human creatures to know. Other knowledge, although of the most important kind, appears insignificant and trifling when compared with this.

As those, whom Christ thought proper to employ to communicate this knowledge, were mechanics and fishermen, poor men who subsisted by the daily labour of their hands, they must give up their usual occupations in order to execute the purposes of their mission, and, if no other provision were made for their support, necessarily perish for want. Was it reasonable, then, that men, who had given up their usual employment to perform services for the sole benefit of others, should be left without the means of subsistence and be suffered to die? Men do not act in that manner toward one another in other instances. To the labourer, who gives them his time and his services, individuals allow such wages as may be adequate to his support; to the servant of the nation, who fights for it's defence or manages it's affairs, a stipend is given proportioned to his services. Why should not some allowance then be made for the support of the apostles of the Gospel of Christ by those, who had the benefit of their time and of their labours. It is true, there was no stipulation or agreement in the latter case between them and mankind; they did not desire the apostles to preach the Gospel to them and to become their instructors. An office was undertaken by them,

to which they were not called by man. But were their services less valuable, because they were voluntary and gratuitous? If they were men of so much benevolence, as to take up a new but useful employment, at the hazard of their former maintenance and of every thing that was dear to them, can that be any reason with generous or equitable minds, why they should be suffered to lose it, or is it not rather an additional motive for giving them support? Wherever services are performed, and more especially when to the detriment of the agent, there is always a claim to compensation from the party benefitted. This is an acknowledged principle of equity among mankind; and it is upon this principle with others that the apostle Paul grounds his claim to maintenance in his apostolic character: "Have not we power," says he to the Corinthians, "to forbear working? Who goeth a warfare at any time at his own charges?" meaning, that the apostle may as justly look for support as the soldier, who fights for others, expects to be maintained by them. He appeals also to another principle, which was acknowledged to be alike equitable, that a man who engages in any employment should be maintained by it: "Who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock?"

To this method of reasoning it might be objected, that it was only just as applied to worldly matters,

and that in religious concerns men ought to be directed by some other principles. To obviate this objection, the same apostle produces arguments in support of his claim from the law of Moses, in which it was ordained, that the priests, who ministered in the tabernacle and temple, should have for their maintenance a certain portion of the sacrifices and offerings presented there: "Do ye not know that they, who minister about holy things, live of the things of the temple? and they, who wait at the altar, are partakers with the altar?" Yea, so attentive was the law of Moses to this principle, that every one ought to be supported by the employment in which he was engaged, that it extended the law to brutes, and therefore prohibited the Jews from muzzling the ox which was employed in treading out the corn, a practice made use of in eastern countries instead of threshing it. He insists upon it, that this order was given, not so much for the sake of oxen as for the instruction of mankind, to inculcate upon them this equitable principle, that every one has a right to live by his profession. So that it appears hence, that the apostle was supported by the claim which he advanced, not only by those principles of equity and justice which reason teaches men, but likewise by the light of revelation, which prescribed the like things: "Say I these things as a man; or saith not the law the same also? For it is written in the law of Moses, thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that tread-

eth out the corn? Doth God take care of oxen; or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written; that he that plougheth should plough in hope; and that he that threshеth in hope should be partaker of his hope. If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?"

Notwithstanding the strong manner in which the apostle Paul pleadeth his right to a maintenance as an apostle, he declined accepting of any thing from the church of Corinth, from motives which do not clearly appear, except in general that it was to promote the furtherance of the Gospel; whether he was afraid that the Corinthians would be disgusted with the Gospel, if they found it burdensome; or that, if he accepted of a maintenance from them, the false apostle they had among them would plead his example for accepting one too. Yet what he declined from the Corinthians, for reasons which only applied to that city, he received from other churches, and even at the time when he resided at Corinth: "Have I committed an offence," says he, "in abasing myself, that you might be exalted, because I have preached to you the Gospel of God freely? I robbed other churches, taking wages of them to do you service; and when I was present with you and wanted, I was chargeable to no man; for that, which was lacking to me, the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied, and in all things I have kept myself from being burdensome to you, and so will

I keep myself." We now see, then, how clearly both reason and Scripture decide in favour of the apostles of Christ having an adequate maintenance. We are, secondly, to enquire how far the preachers of the Gospel in the present day are entitled to a like support.

Here some are prepared to maintain, that the present ministers of the Gospel, at least those of them who belong to a particular church, are the successors of the apostles, that they derive their office from the appointment of God and the suggestions of the Holy Spirit, and are entitled to the same rights as the apostles asserted; that they have a claim not only to support from those they serve in the Gospel of Christ, but likewise to be maintained in riches and affluence; and where men will not contribute voluntarily toward these purposes, that they ought to be compelled to do it by the force of human laws; for that the support of their office is necessary to the well being of society, and the existence of the Christian religion in the world.

This is the idea which some entertain of the origin of the Christian ministry, and of the claim which it has to support; but I choose not to rest my plea for the maintenance of a class of teachers of Christianity upon such precarious ground. Feeble indeed is the hold, which the Christian religion has upon the faith and affections of mankind, if nothing but compulsion can induce them to give it support. A stronger presumption against it's truth and excel-

lence unbelievers could not desire. I am persuaded that the imputation is not just, and that it originates with men, who either support a corrupt system of Christianity, or who are not aware of the strength of the foundation upon which it is built. Those, who found their right to the office of teachers upon the appointment of God, derived to them by uninterrupted succession from the apostles, must receive it through the impure channel of the Roman catholic church, and must admit, what they will by no means be ready to allow, that the ministers of the church of Rome have at least as good a title as those of any protestant church.

I admit, that the apostles left no successors to their office and authority in the world, and that those who preach the Gospel in the present day have no other just pretension to the office they exercise than what they derive from their own inclinations, and the wishes of their Christian brethren. I also admit, that they have a claim to no farther assistance than what is necessary to their maintenance, and what may be given them voluntarily; that a class of men, who shall devote all their time and labour to the acquisition and communication of Christian knowledge, is highly convenient and useful, but by no means necessary to the support of the Christian religion in the world.

We see, that in society the same individual does not apply himself to every branch of business or science, but that each confines himself to one profes-

sion, and leaves to other men the care of other professions. The foundation of this division of labour is, that it is known from experience, that every art is exercised in a manner more advantageous to society, and is more speedily advanced toward perfection, where men confine themselves to one object, than where they attempt to extend their attention to a great number. Thus, there are men, who apply themselves solely to the study of law or of medicine; and it is admitted, that the knowledge of the art of healing and of the institutions of civil society is better promoted by these means, than if they attempted to become acquainted with both professions; human life not affording sufficient time for the latter purpose, or the human understanding not being equal to so great an undertaking.

On this principle it must contribute more to the progress of religious knowledge, and to the interests of piety and virtue as connected with it, to have a class of men who shall devote all their time and attention to the study of the Scriptures, and of other branches of knowledge, which may assist them in ascertaining their meaning, than if they took up this business as an occasional employment, just as the other pursuits of life might afford them leisure. If religious instruction be delivered, some person must be appointed to perform the office, and some time must be allowed him to qualify himself for the duties of it; especially if it should be expected from him, that he should be frequently engaged. But

this occupation of his time must wholly prevent him from applying to the ordinary business of life, or from applying to it with such a degree of attention as may be necessary for his support. And where men sustain an injury or inconvenience for the benefit of others, it cannot be deemed unreasonable, that they should receive a compensation.

It is upon this principle, that the teachers of religion in the present day are entitled to support. Having forsaken the usual occupations of life, by which men obtain the means of subsistence, in order to apply themselves to the acquisition and communication of religious knowledge, it is no more than justice and equity, that some other provision should be made for their support by those, who enjoy the benefit of their labours. And most of those arguments, which have been adduced to show the propriety of providing for the apostles, may be urged with equal force here. For if the workman be worthy of his meal, or the labourer of his hire, those labourers in the Gospel, who devote their time to the religious improvement of mankind, ought not to be excepted from this rule. By the principles of common equity they are entitled to support. These, we have seen, are binding upon men, although the service performed come unasked for and be voluntarily offered. But their claim is still stronger, where those services have been called for and desired, and the parties benefitted have entered into an express or implied engagement to bestow it. If the ministers of

the Gospel faithfully apply their time and their talents to the instruction and edification of those, who have thus called for their assistance, so as to deserve the name of workmen and labourers, their claim to a maintenance is here clear and incontestable; I say to a maintenance only; for that is all, that the principle, of which we have been speaking, or the reasoning of the apostle requires. No one thinks, that he is bound to make the labourer, the benefit of whose services he enjoys, rich: if he furnish him with the means of comfortable subsistence, he thinks he has discharged his duty; there is no more that he can justly claim. If any one should object to applying the common principles of equity observed in the affairs of life to the business of religion, we can appeal, as the apostle does, to the law of Moses, where those, who served the altar, partook of the altar, and were allowed a subsistence from it; or to the decision of Jesus Christ himself, who, he tells us, has ordained, that they, who preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel. Such high authority it is impossible that any one should withstand.

I have been led to insist upon this subject at this time, because it is the day appointed for making a collection for the support of dissenting ministers in this and a neighbouring county. You will easily see, how what has been said applies to their case, and shows the propriety of making a provision for their support. If the employment of instructing mankind in the principles of religion be useful, which

no Christian will deny, and if they devote so much of their time to it as to prevent them from engaging in the usual occupations of life, they have a claim to a maintenance some other way. But that they do not receive this assistance from the societies which they serve, is well known. The amount of their income from this source falls short in many instances of the gains of the common mechanic, while their expenses, on account of the station which they hold in society, are much greater. It may be said, indeed, that every society of Christians, which chooses to have a minister, and which has invited one to fill that office, ought to provide for him; and it must be acknowledged, that they are bound to do it, so far as they are able; but if they be so few in number, or so destitute in point of property, as not to be able to raise a sufficient sum for the purpose, and if without it they cannot enjoy the full benefit of religious instruction, it is surely a proper object of Christian benevolence to assist them, that the people may ot suffer the evils which arise from ignorance, or the ministers those which spring from a scanty subsistence. The churches of Macedonia contributed toward the support of the apostle Paul, and he commends them for it, at a time when they received no benefit from his labours, and when he served another society, from whom he would accept of no pay. What you are required to do in the present instance is not so much as this: you are requested to assist those, who have exerted them-

selves already as far as their ability reaches, and in some instances beyond their power.

I have often recommended this institution to your support on past occasions, and if any change have taken place in the circumstances of the times, it is such as renders that support more necessary now than on former occasions. If the cause of protestant dissenters lie under peculiar odium at present, if the rich and great be ashamed of their former connections and ready to withdraw their assistance—these are circumstances, which call for peculiar attention from those who remain, and who deem the cause in which they are engaged the cause of Christian truth and liberty. If it be not zealously supported when thus attacked by enemies and deserted by friends, it must necessarily fall to the ground. I hope better things of you, my brethren, than to suppose, that you will withhold your assistance in such circumstances. I trust, that your contributions, on the present occasion, will be in proportion to the increased exigency of the case.

SERMON XXXV.

AGAINST PERSECUTION FOR RELIGIOUS OPINION.

LUKE xiv, 23.

And the Lord said unto the Servant, Go out into the Highways and Hedges, and compel them to come in, that my House may be filled.

UNDER the similitude of a feast, Christ represents to us the offers, which were made of the Gospel to the Jewish nation. Those who were first bidden, refusing upon various pretences to come, the Lord of the house sends forth his servants into the highways and hedges, to the outcasts of mankind, the gentile world, who had hitherto seemed to be abandoned by God, with orders to compel them to come in, *i. e.* to set before them such powerful evidence, and to urge it with so much importunity, that they should not be able to resist the force of their arguments. That the compulsion here mentioned cannot mean any external violence is evident from the nature of the parable: for no man attempts to force guests to his table, although he may think it right to employ earnest entreaties and pressing invitations, which his friends may not know how to resist. In the same manner as men compel friends

to their houses, whom they earnestly desire to see, were the disciples of Christ to compel converts into the kingdom of their master. They were, as one of them, expresses it on another occasion, to be instant in season and out of season, reproving, rebuking, exhorting, with all long suffering and doctrine. In this sense Christ is said to have constrained or compelled his disciples to go into a ship, where no one supposes that he either drove or dragged them into it; but that he exerted his authority over them for this purpose. Peter also compelled the Gentiles to the observance of the Jewish law, although he employed nothing more than the authority of his example to influence their conduct. Indeed the use of the word *compel* in common language to signify irresistible arguments is so very frequent and familiar, as scarcely to need any illustration. Yet upon this easy figure an argument has been founded for employing force and violence to convert men to the truth; and Christ has been represented as authorising his apostles in the first commission, which he gave them to preach his Gospel to the world, to use such means. I shall, therefore, take occasion from this passage to show, that to employ force for the defence of truth or for restraining errour is unjust; that it cannot answer the purposes expected from it; and that it is productive of great evils to mankind, and inconsistent with the spirit of the Gospel.

I. In the first place it is unjust: for men's opinions in religion are formed upon the arguments

presented to the mind, and they cannot withhold their assent at pleasure, nor can they change their opinions, unless the ground upon which they are formed be changed likewise. The conviction of the judgment is the necessary result of evidence. To punish men, therefore, for their religious opinions is to punish them for what they cannot help, and it is impossible for them to avoid. This is the highest degree of injustice and cruelty: it is to make men miserable for following the law of their nature, for believing that to be true which they perceive to be so, for seeing with their eyes and hearing with their ears. This is to treat men worse than we treat brutes, who are never corrected for faults, which they cannot avoid. Shall we say, that they are punished, not for believing what they think to be true, but for being governed by prejudice, and shutting their eyes against the light? Who authorised you to decide, that those who differ from you are influenced by prejudice, and averse from receiving the truth? Can you dive into the secrets of the heart, and judge of the motives by which they are determined? Will you assume to yourself the prerogative of God? To him it belongs to condemn men for their principles, but not to any human tribunal. Is it not the duty of every man to exercise his faculties in judging for himself? and can we have a right to punish him for doing so? Opposite rights cannot exist at the same time. We cannot be bound by one law to yield to what appears to us to

be the truth, and yet be obliged by another to renounce it. Upon whom is it that sufferings are inflicted by persecution? Not upon hypocrites and cowards, who deny their principles, or profess what they do not believe; but upon the upright and conscientious, who have courage and virtue to avow their sentiments—Are these the men, that ought to be marked out for vengeance from the rest of human society? Are these the men, who deserve to be treated as the pests of society, and the common enemies of mankind? Is it a crime to follow conscience, and to act agreeably to the dictates of the mind after serious and diligent inquiry? The practice of persecutors declares it to be so; but common sense and common justice revolt at the idea.

II. To employ force to restrain men from errour, or to bring them back to the truth, will not answer the purposes of those, by whom it is used, and is therefore an instance of folly as well as of injustice. If men have power to exterminate by death or banishment all those who differ from them, persecution may answer their purposes by ridding them of their adversaries. But as the means of conviction and reformation it will be found wholly inadequate; for what connection is there between religious truth and human penalties? Can pain or imprisonment, the loss of property, or the loss of honour, enlighten the understanding or convince the judgment? Those, who have recourse to such violent instruments of conviction, excite a strong suspicion in

the minds of other men, that they have nothing better to offer: it is always regarded as an acknowledgment, that the cause is weak, and that it cannot be supported in any other way; which confirms the persecuted in their present sentiments. When men are fully convinced of the truth of the opinions which they hold, their minds are quiet and easy. They treat with contempt rather than resentment the endeavours of their opponents to overthrow them. In a contest between evident truth and manifest errour they entertain no apprehensions about the issue; they can leave their cause to defend itself without fear. This bold and magnanimous conduct tends to shake the confidence of their adversaries. But where the mind is unsettled, and men are not fully satisfied of the truth of their own sentiments, every argument, which is suggested on the other side of the question, disturbs and embarrasses them. The uneasy state of their minds makes them angry with those, who occasioned it. Their apprehension of being defeated induces them to have recourse to some other method of defence than what truth and justice can afford—to such as may gratify their resentments by punishing the authors of their misery, or give security to their sentiments by silencing the voice of opposition. On this account, persecution is always a presumption of a bad cause in the minds of thinking men; for truth stands not in need of such support, nor will those, who are persuaded that they possess the truth, have recourse to it.

An attempt to compel men by force to renounce their principles is such an infringement of their liberties, as all are disposed to resent and oppose: it only makes them hold faster what you endeavour to take away by unjust means and unworthy treatment. When injured in their persons, liberty, or property, for professing what they believe, their passions are inflamed, and their hatred is quickly transferred from the persons of their persecutors to their sentiments; they are strongly prejudiced against principles, which they conceive to be the cause of their sufferings, and can never attend with coolness and impartiality to any arguments which can be offered in their support. A violent antipathy is created in their minds to overpower the strength of reasoning. Nothing can discover, therefore, greater ignorance of human nature, than to expect the propagation of truth by violence; whereas dispassionate reasoning, accompanied with kindness and love, subdues men's prejudices, and invites their attention.

Persecution generally produces an effect quite opposite to the wishes of those who make use of it: it establishes, instead of destroying, the faith of the human mind. Those who suffer, or who are in danger of suffering for their religious principles, are naturally led to reflect seriously upon them: all the powers of their mind are awakened and directed to one object, which is closely examined, and becomes the subject of constant meditation. The consequence of this attention is such a strong and

lively conviction of the truth of their sentiments, as they never possessed before: their value for them, and zeal to inculcate them upon others, increase in the same proportion, and from doubting advocates they become zealous and confirmed believers. Such is the usual consequence of persecution. Hence it has arisen, that times of persecution have been extremely favourable to the interests of the Christian religion. By directing men's attention to the great articles of their faith, it has produced a seriousness, fervour, and zeal, unknown to other times; and, accordingly, it has been justly observed, "that the blood of the martyrs has been the seed of the church."

III. We are to point out some of the evils which arise to mankind from the practice of persecution. These are too many to be all enumerated. I can only mention a few of the sources from which they arise. The loss of property is the least of these evils. With a considerable share of their substance men would cheerfully part, to obtain the liberty of pursuing the sentiments of their own minds, and worshipping God agreeably to the dictates of conscience. But with inflicting moderate losses persecutors are not satisfied: nothing will answer their views but heavy fines and grievous penalties. They prosecute the object of their hatred with relentless malice, till he is reduced from plenty and affluence to poverty and wretchedness; till they have involved his nearest relations and dependants in the same

ruin. If these lighter evils cannot compel the sufferer to renounce the truth, or become a hypocrite, he shall endure greater. To them shall be added banishment from his native country, and he shall be driven to rely upon the generosity of strangers, amid the dangers of an inhospitable foreign climate: and happy may he esteem himself in trusting to the wild beasts of the forest rather than to men, who maintain that furious character in human shape. Such lenient punishment as banishment is, however, seldom inflicted; persecutors are not willing to suffer their prey to go out of their reach. The unhappy victim is condemned to those receptacles, which are appropriated to the confinement of the most adandoned of mankind, of thieves and murderers, and other malefactors, as if to follow the truth were a fault equally deserving of punishment with the crimes of such offenders. In these dreary abodes the prisoner is shut out from the cheerful light of day and the pleasant face of nature; he is deprived of what is far more dear to him, the soothing intercourse of friends, the tender endearments of wife and children, sister or brother. When his health is impaired, and disease attacks him, there is no sympathising breast to soften his distresses, no merciful hand to administer relief; he is left to pine with sickness unpitied and unnoticed. His only companions are darkness, solitude, and silence; or, if a sound sometimes reach his ears, it is the sound of the chains of his fellow sufferers, or the sighs and

the moanings of the wretched. If his fortitude cannot be subdued by long and hard confinement, if he persist in asserting the truth notwithstanding his sufferings, a more bitter cup of affliction remains—prepare thyself, O wretched man! for the last effort of human malice; for death, not in it's ordinary forms—that would be a merciful punishment compared with what thou hast to suffer—but for death with the most dreadful tortures which human nature can bear—prepare to be burnt in the fire! The prisoner is led from his cell; crowds press round him with eager curiosity, to observe every look and every gesture. But there is no trembling in his limbs, no symptom of fear in his countenance; his aspect is serene and mild. The populace behold, with awful astonishment, his undaunted behaviour. He is fastened to the stake; the faggots are piled round him; the executioner is about to kindle the flames—but there is one cruel ceremony, which must first be performed. The criminal is offered his life, if he will recant his opinions; but he rejects the offer with disdain, when it can only be purchased by the sacrifice of truth. When the fire, which is immediately kindled, reaches his body, torture is conveyed by every pore; the drops which trickle from his face mark the extremity of his agony. In these dreadful circumstances what do we hear from the lips of the sufferer?—not cries and lamentations—not blasphemy against God, and imprecations upon his enemies, but, as long as the power of utterance

remains, prayers for their forgiveness, the fullest confidence in the Father of mercies, and the highest exultation and triumph in his future prospects. Thus dies the martyr to the truth, and thus cruelly are the best of men treated by the world; but his sufferings are far preferable to the lot of those, who are compelled to drag on a wretched existence for years in gloomy dungeons or intolerable bondage. To them death, in it's most dreadful form, would be a welcome event, as setting them free from their sufferings.

IV. Persecution is inconsistent with the precepts and spirit of the Gospel. If there be any one precept certainly delivered, if there be any duty of more certain obligation, it is that of charity and benevolence. The language of our Saviour in his admirable sermon on the mount was, "blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth; blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy; blessed are the peace makers, for they shall be called the children of God." Love is what he enjoins upon his disciples as his peculiar command, "this is *my* commandment, that ye love one another;" "by this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another." As he foreknew the persecutions, which his disciples would suffer, he gave them encouragement under them, by assuring them, that they were the marks of the divine favour, and the forerunners of a glorious reward; while he leaves a brand of infamy upon persecutors, and marks them

at for the vengeance of God. "Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in Heaven; for so persecuted they the prophets that went before you. Wo unto you, for ye build the sepulchres of the prophets, and your fathers killed them. Therefore also, said the wisdom of God, I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will slay and persecute, that the blood of all the prophets may be required of this generation." So far was our Lord from encouraging persecution, that he discountenanced all appearance of it with indignation. Thus, when his disciples would have called down fire from Heaven to consume the Samaritans, who refused to receive them, he rebuked them by saying, "Ye know not what spirit ye are of. The Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." And when one of those who were with him cut off the ear of one of the high priest's servants, he severely reproved him; "Put up thy sword again into it's place; for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword." When the apostles went out to preach, they were sent not like armed men, but without staves, or scrip, or bread, or money, to show that they had nothing to depend upon but the truth of their cause and the assistance of divine Providence. They approved themselves the ministers of God, not by excommunications, suspensions, fines, banishments, imprisonments, bonds, scourges, tortures, and death; but by much patience, by affliction, distresses, stripes, imprison-

ments, tumults, labours, watchings, fastings, pureness, knowledge, long suffering, kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the words of truth, by the power of God, and by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left. The description, which St. James gives of the wisdom that is from above, is this; "The wisdom, that is from above, is pure, and peaceable, and gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy." But if we have bitter envyings and strife in our hearts, we have nothing to glory in, but we lie against the truth, *i. e.* we belie our Christian profession; for this wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. Many other passages might be produced to the same purpose, if it were necessary; but these are sufficient to show, that there is nothing in Scripture to countenance the spirit of persecution, or any of the modes of persecution.

Some persons will perhaps think, that, however proper it might be a century ago to insist upon such a subject as that we have now been treating, it is wholly unnecessary at the present day, when every man renounces persecution both in principle and practice. To this I answer, that, however well informed upon this subject the aged members of a Christian society may be, there are always young persons, who need to have their minds guarded against this pernicious errour; and with respect to

those without I have to say, that it is well known there are many laws still unrepealed, which, if enforced, would authorise persecution in it's worst form, and that it is by no means certain, that they will never be revived. The great alarm which has been raised in the minds of many by the change which has been taking place in the opinions of men, and the external state of religion, may occasion the employment of force to stop their progress, and the adoption of measures for this purpose, which may now be viewed with horrour. Nor, while wicked passions remain in the hearts of men, will the world ever be secure from the return of this evil, either under the form of law or without the sanction of it's authority. Our best security lies in inculcating continually a strong detestation of both the principle and the practice.

I shall now conclude with making two observations.

I. That the ministers of the Gospel, notwithstanding the mild nature of their religion and so many express precepts of Scripture, have been the principal promoters of persecutions. Secondly, that we cannot take too much pains to banish persecuting principles from the world.

I. The ministers of the Gospel have been the principal promoters of persecution. This is a melancholy and surprising fact, which, for the honour of human nature, one would wish incapable of being proved; but it is supported by evidence too

plain to be denied. From men, whose minds were or ought to have been enlarged by education, whose business it was to study the Scriptures, and who may be supposed to have been best acquainted with the spirit of Christianity, one might justly have expected a different conduct; yet ecclesiastical history testifies but too plainly, that they have been as deeply engaged in persecuting measures, as if such measures had been expressly inculcated in the New Testament, and recommended by the practice of Christ and his apostles. Nor has this been the conduct of the ministers of one party or denomination of Christians only, but of all; of Calvin at Geneva, of Luther in Germany, of the Puritans as well as Conformists in England, and of the Presbyterians in Scotland. They have all countenanced persecution in their turns in a greater or less degree. "Some few there have been," says Dr. Chandler in the close of his history of persecution, "some few there have been, who were of a different spirit, who not only abstained from persecuting counsels and measures themselves, but with great justice and freedom censured them in others. But as to your saints and fathers, your patriarchs and bishops, your councils and synods, together with the rabble of monks, they were most of them the advisers, abettors and practisers of persecution. They knew not how to brook opposition to their own opinions and power, branded all doctrines different from their own with the odious name of heresy, and used all their arts

and influence to oppose and destroy those, who presumed to maintain them. And this they did with such unanimity and constancy, through a long succession of many ages, as would tempt a stander by to think, that a bishop or clergyman, and a persecutor, were the same thing, or meant the self same individual character and office in the Christian church."

Upon this quotation I shall only remark, that where classes of men have so generally fallen into the same palpable errour, candour will lead us to suppose, that something in their situations has laid them under peculiar temptation to persecute. All counsels, therefore, which come from such quarters, tending to abridge religious liberty, ought always to be received with caution.

In the last place, we cannot take too much pains to deliver the world from persecuting principles and measures. It is to rid the world of a monster, which has devoured millions of the human race, and rendered miserable many millions more. The peace of human society is never secure while he exists. Unspeakable are our obligations to those, who broke the teeth of this monster; and greatly will mankind be indebted to those, under Providence, whoever they may be, by whom he shall receive his death-wound. That moment will be the beginning of a happy æra in the Christian church. It will be the dawning of that fair day of universal peace and love, which the Scripture has taught us to expect under

the government of the Messiah, when the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the lion shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.

SERMON XXXVI.

THE FUTURE EXISTENCE OF INFANTS ASSERTED*.

JOHN V, 28, 29.

Marvel not at this: for the Hour is coming, in the which all that are in the Graves shall hear his Voice, 29. *And shall come forth, they that have done good, unto the Resurrection of Life, and they that have done evil, unto the Resurrection of Damnation.*

ONE of the most important advantages, which we derive from the Gospel of Christ, is the light which it throws upon the condition of man in the grave. The heathen world, before the coming of Christ, entertained some obscure notions respecting another life for the souls of the dead, and of rewards or punishments being appointed for men according to their different characters. Yet their expectations were founded upon tradition rather than argument. The resurrection of the dead, upon which alone the hope of a future life can be securely built, made no part of their system; and their conceptions respecting future happiness were extremely low and gross. The Sadducees, a considerable sect among the Jews, denied the doctrine of a re-

* Printed in the year 1799, but never before published.

surrection altogether; and, although the Pharisees believed it, we learn, that they had very imperfect notions upon the subject: nor is it possible, at the present day, with all the additional light and knowledge, acquired during a period of near two thousand years, to produce an argument for the resurrection of the dead, which shall appear perfectly satisfactory and free from doubt to an inquisitive mind. The most that can be said of any single argument, which can be offered, or of all conjointly, is, that they afford a considerable degree of probability, a strong presumption, that there will be a future life, but not that they amount to complete certainty, to such a kind of certainty, as will restrain the passions of mankind, and afford solid comfort to the mind in the prospect of death, or when distressed by the loss of valuable relatives or friends. But what reason cannot teach, what tradition failed to communicate or grossly corrupted, what the Scriptures of the Old Testament only obscurely intimated, if at all, the Christian Religion proclaims in clear and express terms, the sense of which it is not possible to doubt or to controvert. Of this the text may be produced as an illustrious example, wherein Jesus, the authorised messenger of Heaven, declares, that the whole human race shall awake from their slumbers at his call and rise from the grave.

He had said in verse 25 of this chapter, with that double asseveration, with which he usually introduces a sentiment of more than ordinary importance,

" verily, verily, I say unto you, the hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live;" where he foretels, that the time would come when he should raise the dead, and intimates, that he already exercises this power, referring probably to the general power he possessed of raising the dead in proof of his divine mission, and perhaps to particular instances, in which it had been already exerted, as in the case of the son of the widow of Nain and of Jairus's daughter. I do not include that of Lazarus, because he was not raised till some time after this period. These were persons to whom he had already restored life; but however wonderful might be the power displayed on these occasions, something more extraordinary was to be expected from him. These individuals were few in number, had not been long dead, and were not yet laid in the grave; but the time was coming, when he should perform the like office for all who were in the grave, whoever they might be, and however long they had lain there. " Marvel not at this; for the hour is coming, in which all, that are in the graves, shall hear his voice and shall come forth."

From these words I shall take occasion to inquire more particularly what persons are included in this declaration; from which inquiry, I apprehend, it will appear, that they are persons of every character, of all generations, and of every age.

I. When it is asserted in the text that all, that are

in the graves, shall be raised to life, persons of every character are intended, the wicked as well as the good.

This is evident from the words which follow; for after saying, that all shall come forth, Jesus adds: "they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation," or rather punishment*, hereby including all persons of the characters just mentioned. Other passages of Scripture likewise, which assure us of a resurrection, plainly teach, that it is intended for both; and there is an evident propriety in this appointment. For it is proper that the good should rise to be rewarded and made happy. This favour is what has been promised to them, what they have fully expected, and what they are prepared to enjoy. If God, therefore, will be faithful to his engagements, if he will fulfil the reasonable expectations of his servants, if he will exalt those to a superior state of being, who are qualified for entering upon it, he must raise them from the dead, without doing which, none of these objects can be accomplished. It is no less proper also, that the wicked should rise to be punished. This is what their actions have merited, and what cannot sufficiently take place in the present world. Vice is here often prosperous and triumphant; it is frequently elevated

* See Wakefield's Translation of the New Testament, and Bishop Pearce's Note on the meaning of the word κρισις, Acts vii, 7.

above the reach of human laws, or concealed from human observation; it is covered with the garb of hypocrisy, or protected by wealth and power. It is necessary, therefore, that it should be removed to a world, where it may be stripped of every disguise, and deprived of those advantages, by which it was before enabled to screen itself from justice; where it may be exposed to view in it's native deformity, and punished with a severity proportioned to it's guilt. Such a distinction as this, between virtue and vice, justice requires from God as the moral governor of the world, who must be induced to adopt every possible method to encourage the one and to discountenance the other. In this life, indeed, we see virtue to be generally accompanied with happiness, and vice with misery; but the difference between, them it seems, is not sufficiently obvious and striking to answer the ends of the divine government. Were good men only raised to life and the wicked suffered to lie for ever in the grave, that difference would be more apparent, the wicked sustaining an irreparable loss, and the displeasure of God against the offender being strongly marked. But we learn from revelation, that something more than this is necessary to express the divine abhorrence of vice, some positive suffering, and that of so terrible a nature, as may deter men from criminal indulgencies. For this reason offenders must be raised from the dead, and sent to a place, where this punishment may be inflicted.

The divine Being is compelled to treat wicked

men with such severity in order to secure the purposes of his moral administration, and also to preserve his own character and honour; for this punishment is what he has repeatedly threatened: and it is as necessary to fulfil his threatenings to the wicked as his promises to the good: not to do so would sink him in the estimation of his creatures, and expose his authority to contempt.

II. The language of the text in asserting, that "all, that are in the graves, shall hear the voice of the son of man and come forth," includes persons of all generations.

At the time this declaration was made about four thousand years had elapsed from the beginning of the world. In that period of time many millions of the human race must have fallen by the hand of death, and were then lying in the grave. All these were certainly included in Christ's declaration, whether Jews or Gentiles, members of the commonwealth of Israel, or strangers to it. From the time at which he spoke, to the present, almost two thousand years more have revolved, in which a much larger number must have died than in the two preceding periods of the same length, on account of the increasing population of the human race. How many years more may pass from this time to the end of the world, it is impossible to say, but probably a much greater number than since the ministry of Christ. For if we consider how much his doctrines and institutions have been corrupted, and how long

those corruptions have lasted, and that at this moment they are by no means removed, it seems reasonable to conclude from the known wisdom and goodness of the divine Being, that the period in which the Christian religion shall flourish in it's original purity will at least be equal to, if not greater than, that, in which it has been in a state of corruption.

But whatever may be it's duration, as it will be the last period of time, and therefore the most prosperous, and on both accounts the most prolific in human beings, those that die will be much more numerous than in any preceding portion of time of the same extent. All these, together with those who were laid in the grave before them, from Christ to Adam, the first man, "shall hear the voice of the son of God and come forth." The law of resurrection is as extensive and universal as the law of mortality. "As in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive." A resurrection is as necessary or proper for those, who lived in one period of time, as for those who lived in another, for the heathen as for the Christian and Jew, for him who lived before the flood, as well as for him who lived after it: for they were all rational creatures, and had all sufficient knowledge, either from the light of nature or revelation, to enable them to discharge their duty. They must all, therefore, have virtues to be rewarded or sins to be punished, and are proper objects for

being summoned before the tribunal of Christ, and for being "judged every one according to his works."

How immense a multitude is here! too large for the human imagination to grasp. How grand and important must that object be, for which so many myriads of human beings are brought into life again! how powerful that voice, which can call them all from the tomb at once!

III. Persons of all ages will rise from the dead.

The words, "all that are in the graves," must include persons of every age, the youngest as well as the oldest; for all are buried, the one as well as the other, or, if all should not, that circumstance will not exclude any from the benefit of this declaration; for so universal is the custom of laying the dead in graves or tombs, that the expression "all that are in the graves," comes to signify the same thing, as all that die, which last words certainly include persons of every period of life.

That the old should be raised from the dead, or those pretty far advanced in years, appears perfectly consistent with the design of the resurrection, whatever we may suppose that design to be, whether to reward or punish, make happy or miserable.

For, if Heaven be considered as a reward of certain services performed on earth, the aged Christian has done something to render himself a fit object of divine bounty. In the course of so many years he has had many opportunities of showing his fidelity to his master, of doing his work and of accomplish-

ing the purposes for which he was employed; and being grown old in his service, it is but reasonable and just, or at least it is generous, to bestow upon him some signal mark of favour.

Or, if Heaven, the state of good men after death, be considered as consisting in certain employments (for performing which properly men are to be trained in the present life), as in contemplating the works, the dispensations, or the nature of the Almighty, and in worshipping and praising him for his great excellencies and various benefits, or in doing acts of beneficence to the human race, for such employments men of virtuous character, who are far advanced in life, must be supposed to be well prepared; for to worship God and to do good to mankind have long been their favourite occupations. They have acquired a relish for such services before they die, and, when brought to life, will enter upon them with fresh delight.

Or, if a future life be a state of improvement, in which the character of man is to be gradually raised to perfection, and his happiness to receive continual accessions, a good foundation for making such improvement has been already laid by the persons of whom I am now speaking, in the virtues they have acquired; and to complete the scheme they have been prosecuting they want nothing but a better country and more favourable circumstances, advantages which they are now going to enjoy.

In whatever light therefore a future state of happi-

ness be regarded, it must be adapted to the character of aged piety.

But what are we to think respecting those who have gone to the grave at so early a period of life as to have been incapable of forming any ideas of God, and who could never know what it was to take pleasure in his service, or to perform any thing which he requires? Are children and infants to rise from the dead, and to be invested at once with the happiness of Heaven, without doing any thing to deserve it, and without acquiring those habits which are deemed necessary to qualify others for such a state of enjoyment? Shall a long conflict with corrupt passions, or steady resistance to powerful temptations, be thought requisite to entitle some to reward, while others are allowed to receive it without any conflict at all? To permit persons of the same nature to enter the same place of honour and enjoyment upon such different conditions, may not seem consistent with that equity and impartiality which we should expect in the great Governor of the world, and may appear not to hold out sufficient encouragement to exertion. On this account some persons may be led to doubt whether that part of the human race, which dies in infancy or childhood, be intended by God for the happiness of a future life. I shall now therefore endeavour to show that such a measure is not inconsistent with reason or Scripture.

Let it be remembered, then, that the question is not, whether they shall be happy or miserable in a

future life; for if children cannot be ranked with those that have done good, because they have had no ability to do it, so neither can they be classed with those that have done evil, for they are equally incapable of that also. Nor do I take notice of the opinion of those who suppose that infants are condemned to the punishments of Hell, for the transgression of our first parent Adam, or for the corrupt nature which they derived from him. This sentiment is too absurd, too cruel, and too unworthy of the divine perfections to merit the smallest consideration. But what we have to determine is, whether they are to be made happy with good men in a future life, or to lie for ever in the grave. This latter supposition will appear highly improbable, if we consider that there is nothing in the Scriptures to justify such a conclusion, that there is nothing in the temper of infants which unfits them for Heaven, and that it is perfectly consistent with the wisdom and goodness of God to give them a place there.*

* In the succeeding observations I have not insisted upon the argument for the resurrection of infants founded upon the covenant made with Abraham, or upon that which was afterwards made with Moses and the Children of Israel, both which some have considered as containing a promise of restoration to life; and as extending equally to all believers in Christ, and their offspring; nor have I laid any stress upon the Christian ordinance of baptism, as conveying such an intimation; but had recourse to more general considerations, which appear to be more decisive of the question. Those who wish to see what may be said on these arguments, may consult THE BAPTISM OF INFANTS A REASON-

I. There is nothing in the Scriptures which can justify the supposition that they will be left in the grave. The contrary seems to be plainly implied, if not expressly asserted. The apostle Paul, in his first epistle to the Corinthians, compares the benefits of Christ's obedience with the consequences arising from Adam's transgression, and declares the one to be as extensive as the other: "For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive:" 1 Cor. xv, 21, 22. If infants be included, as no doubt they are, among the number of those who die in consequence of their relation to Adam, they must likewise be included among those who are here said to be raised to life by Christ. If we admit the premises, it is impossible to avoid the conclusion.

A like inference may be drawn, as has been already observed, from the general expressions which are used in the text; or allowing, what however I see no occasion to grant, that the words *all that are in the graves* are to be explained by what follows, and relate only to persons who have arrived at years of discretion, and who have done either good or evil; yet there is nothing in this, or in any other passage of the New Testament, to support the contrary conclusion, that they will be left in the grave;

ABLE SERVICE, by Mr. Towgood, or THE COVENANT OF GRACE, AND BAPTISM THE SIGN OF IT, by Dr. John Taylor, where they will find them ably stated.

and this is too great a step to take without authority. Were it the intention of divine goodness that they should always remain there, we might expect to be expressly informed of it. In delivering general declarations, so important an exception required to be noticed, especially considering how liable many would be to give those declarations a false construction, and how great distress they would feel on finding themselves disappointed. In another case, pretty nearly connected with that we are considering, where there was an exception, we find the apostle takes care to mention it; for he tells the Corinthians: "we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed," 1 Cor. xv, 51. Might we not therefore have expected, that he would have said in regard to the present case, were it really to be fact, we shall not all rise, but some of us will be left behind. No unfavourable conclusion, it is certain, ought to be drawn from the silence of Scripture, or from it's saying nothing expressly upon the subject, should it be admitted, for that is easily accounted for, if it appear, as I shall next proceed to show, that the case is of such a nature, as to render it easy to be determined by what has been already revealed; for then a particular revelation is unnecessary.

II. Children and infants possess nothing, which can render them unfit for the happiness of a future life. When born into this world, they have minds, which are capable of exercising all the powers of intelligence, and of acquiring all the virtuous and pi-

ous dispositions, which constitute the character of the Christian. Nothing is wanting for this purpose but time and proper cultivation, which another state of being may afford. With regard to wicked men, there appears to be an obvious reason for their being excluded from Heaven, which is not applicable to the present case; for they have acquired dispositions and habits which are totally inconsistent with the services and employments of that place—they have contracted a dislike both for the worship and service of God—they have no relish for any happiness but what consists in the gratification of the senses, or in the possession of riches, honour, and power—their breasts, instead of being filled with benevolence, are the seat of pride and ambition, of envy and malice—instead of being habituated to obey the will of God, they have been accustomed to follow their own corrupt inclinations—and these habits are grown so inveterate, that nothing will reclaim them. Such men are justly excluded from a place for which they are totally unfit, and admission into which would only perpetuate their vices.

But in the case, of which I am speaking, there are none of the disqualifications now mentioned, if there be no virtues acquired, there are no vices contracted—if there be not perfection, there is innocence, which is an important step towards perfection in a creature capable of the highest religious attainments—there is a mind capable of all the moral virtues, and in a better state for acquiring them, than

the minds of men are, which are always in a greater or less degree corrupted. We find Christ, therefore, pointing out children as possessing dispositions, which fitted them in a particular manner for that state of moral culture, which God had provided under the Christian dispensation, and exhorting his disciples to endeavour to resemble them. "Suffer little children to come unto me and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of Heaven;" Mat. xix, 14. "If any man would become great in the kingdom of Heaven, he must become as a little child;" Mat. xviii, 4.

Those, that possess dispositions, which qualify them so well for the kingdom of God in this world, cannot surely be thought wholly unworthy of a place in that future and superiour kingdom, for which the present was intended as an introduction. Some persons may, indeed, imagine, that none are qualified for Heaven, except those who have made a high degree of proficiency in virtuous attainments, and that children, who have made no such proficiency, must be totally unfit for being placed there. But it should be remembered, that Heaven is not a state, upon entering which men are instantly raised to the highest point of moral excellence they are capable of attaining, and where they always remain stationary, at the same degree of perfection. Those persons give the most rational account of a future life, who represent it as a state of improvement, into which men of very different degrees of virtue may be ad-

mitted, from the enlightened and active Christian, to the uninformed but conscientious heathen, and where they will all find means of making continual progress in virtue without any limits, their knowledge becoming every day more enlarged, their devotion more fervent, their benevolence more disinterested and active, and every other virtue advancing with corespondent pace. If Heaven, therefore, be a state of continual improvement, as reason and revelation seem to teach—if it be adapted to the circumstances of those who have made comparatively but small proficiency in goodness, it is easy to conceive, that it may be suited to the condition of those, who have made no proficiency at all, but whose minds are not corrupted by any wrong bias, and who are prepared to commence a career of excellence as soon as they can receive proper culture. It is easy to conceive, that the young child, being freed, like the rest of the human race, from many of those disadvantages, which are inseparable from these constitutions of flesh and blood, may in that state find his powers gradually unfolded, and his progress in virtue secured and accelerated by suitable motives and discipline.

The same means, whatever they may be, which tend to improve persons of the most refined excellence, must have a like tendency when applied to those, who have yet made no such improvement. There can hardly be a greater difference between the best and least perfect character to be admitted into

Heaven, than there is between that less perfect character and the young infant. If, therefore, the two first, although differing so much from each other, will find Heaven adapted in the best manner to their improvement, why should we not suppose, that it is equally well adapted to the improvement also of the two last?

In the world in which we now live, very different degrees of excellence are to be found, from the aged Christian, who has devoted his whole life to the interests of virtue, to the young child, who has not yet begun to exercise his reason and to enter upon a virtuous course; yet it furnishes all with the means of improvement; and why should not another world furnish them with similar means? May not what takes place here be possible also in Heaven? And are not the present circumstances of virtuous characters intended to afford a general specimen and example of what their future condition will be?

III. To raise the youngest of the human race from the dead, and to give them a place in Heaven, has nothing in it inconsistent with the wisdom and goodness of God. This seems to follow from the two preceding observations. For if there be nothing in their temper, which unfits them for that place, and if it be a state which is well suited to their wants, and in which they may rise to piety and virtue, and the Scriptures have not authorised a contrary conclusion, it cannot be unworthy of God to place them there. On the contrary, it is an in-

stance of goodness, which well accords with the rest of his conduct, and reflects the highest lustre upon his character; for he appears to act in this instance, more perhaps than on some other occasions, from motives of pure and disinterested benevolence—he makes those in a superiour degree happy, who have no claim to his favour.

Let it not be said here, that God, by this conduct, makes those, who have done nothing, equal to those, who have borne the burden and heat of the day, and that this must discourage the exertions of those, who are called to labour in his service. For it is not supposed, that children and infants are placed on a level, in point of honour or enjoyment, with those who have lived longer, and been hereby enabled to make a considerable advancement in goodness; but that they will be ranked in a much inferiour situation, where, however, in a course of time, they will certainly rise to the same advantages. In that world every one will take his station according to the character he possessed when he quitted the present life. He who had made much progress in virtue will be placed in a higher situation—he who had made less, in one lower—and he, who was only beginning to enter upon a virtuous course, in the lowest—each being placed according to his improvements. In this there is nothing inequitable or unjust.

I shall now conclude this discourse with two observations which seem naturally to arise from it.

The first is, that what has been said above may serve to vindicate the conduct of Providence from an imputation, to which, in the apprehension of some, it may appear liable, on account of the treatment of children and infants.

To take from life those, who are just brought into it, who have experienced so many of it's pains, and have had so few opportunities of tasting it's pleasures, may seem to be a severe measure. To destroy what has been so lately created, what possesses such curious organs, and what is capable of so high a degree of improvement, appears unaccountable and inconsistent with those marks of wisdom, which we observe in other parts of the divine administration, especially when we consider, how great a proportion of the human race die at this early period, which some have calculated at one half of the whole number born. But the conduct of Providence is now completely explained and vindicated. Young children are removed from the theatre of this world, that they may appear upon another, where they will be freed from the incumbrances, with which they were oppressed, and be favoured with far superiour advantages—where they will rise to virtue without those dangers, to which the young are exposed in this world, and which too often prove fatal to their welfare, and where they will enjoy pleasure without any mixture of pain.

The preceding observations may serve also to re-

concile those parents to their loss, who have been deprived of children at this early period of life. This is often a very painful and severe trial, which requires more than ordinary fortitude to bear. But let no one suffer himself to sink under the burden. It is our duty to bow with humble submission to the will of God, even where we do not understand his designs; but his intentions are here discovered, and they appear to be full of goodness to the deceased, and not without consolation to the living. If virtuous themselves, they will see and know their beloved offspring again, and assist in training them, if they should want assistance, to all the excellence of which a human being is capable. Their labours for this purpose will not be accompanied as they are here, with anxious fears for the issue, but be animated with the assurance of certain success. With such hopes let them now support their minds.

SERMON XXXVII.

ON THE VALUE OF LIFE AND THE LAWFULNESS OF WISHING IT TERMINATED.

II COR. v, 4.

For we that are in this Tabernacle do groan, being burdened, not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon,

OUR Lord and master had clearly taught the doctrine of a resurrection from the dead, while he was in the world, saying that all, that are in their graves, shall hear the voice of the son of man and come forth; they, that have done good, to the resurrection of life, and they, that have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation; so that no one, who attentively reads the history of his ministry as given us by the evangelists, can doubt whether this doctrine be a part of the Christian system. Nevertheless there are some things relating to that important event, which are more clearly illustrated by the apostle Paul, and some that are communicated by him for the first time, for the knowledge of which we are indebted to the objections of unbelievers, or the fears and apprehensions of the first Christians.

Thus, some persons having asked, how are the

dead raised? *i. e.* why is there a resurrection of the dead; why is not life rather prolonged? why are men suffered to die and then raised to life again, and with what bodies do they come? For an answer to these questions he refers the inquirer to a well known fact in the vegetable creation, where the seed, that is sown, must die to appearance in order to produce a new plant, intimating hereby, that the death of the man is a proper passage to a new life, as the destruction of the seed was a necessary preparation for a new plant. "Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die."

To the second question he replies by saying, that the new body will be very different from the old; the one was weak, corruptible, and mortal, the other shall be supported without food, be unchangeable and everlasting. The first was formed after the model of the great progenitor of the human race, Adam; the second is to be formed after the constitution of the glorified person of Jesus Christ. To illustrate the possibility of such a change, he refers them to the variety which exists in animal bodies, where the flesh of men, of beasts, of fishes, and of birds, goes under one general denomination, although differing much in regard to nature and quality; and to the variety which appears in the heavenly bodies, where the luminaries differ much from one another and from such substances as are upon the earth, and thence infers, that there may be a like difference between the present and future bodies of the saints: "as all flesh is

not the same flesh, and as there are bodies celestial and bodies terrestrial, so is also the resurrection of the dead."

Having thus answered these two questions, Paul proceeds to say, that he will now inform them of something, which he had not communicated before, (which is all that we are to understand by the word *mystery*) that all believers in Christ should not die, but that those, who remain alive at his coming, shall be changed, *i. e.* shall undergo the same happy change without dying, as he had before described as the portion of those, who had been obliged to submit to that event, and this instantaneously. "Behold, I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump, (for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible) and we shall be changed, *i. e.* such of us believers as remain to the last day shall assume the glorified body without dying. This change to take place in the persons of the living at the last day he speaks of under the image of being clothed, or putting on a new dress to be worn for ever from that time. "For this corruptible," says he, "must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, death is swallowed up in victory." Where you are to observe, that by the corruptible and mortal he

does not mean the dead, but the living body; for he is speaking of those who never see death.

The same figure is made use of in the text, in which he speaks of being clothed and unclothed; and the account now given of the apostle's doctrine respecting the resurrection will serve to explain his meaning in this place.

To prove to the Corinthians his sincerity in preaching the Gospel, he had been mentioning in the preceding chapter the sufferings and dangers to which he was exposed in that employment, persuaded they could not avoid inferring, that nothing but the fullest conviction of it's truth and divine origin could induce him voluntarily to encounter so many evils in endeavouring to propagate it in the world. He adds, that the reason, why he did not faint under them, was the assurance, that God would raise him from the dead, and give him a better life than the present one, exempted from pain, and change, and every calamity: "We believe," says he, "and therefore speak, knowing that he, which raised up the Lord Jesus, will raise up us also by Jesus, and present us with you; for which cause *we* faint not," meaning himself, although he uses the plural number and says *we*, as is very common with this apostle in other parts of his writings. In order to place the difference between the present and future life in a more striking light, he compares the constitution of man to a tabernacle or tent, an image, which would naturally present itself to the mind of the apostle, who was by

trade a tent maker, and served extremely well to express his idea; for a tent is an inconvenient structure, erected by men only for a short time, and with a design to be soon taken down; but the future constitution he compares to a house, a much more convenient and lasting structure. The prospect of obtaining so improved a condition reconciled him to dangers and death. "For we know," says he, "that, if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands," *i. e.* not liable to decay like the works of human art, "eternal in the Heavens."

In this tabernacle the apostle laboured under many evils, from which he expected to be released when removed to the superiour and better building, which made him earnestly long for the change: "for in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from Heaven." He should not, however, desire to be released from the present body, unless he were sure of being clothed with another; "if so be, that being stripped," (for so the passage ought to stand upon the authority of several manuscripts and versions, as well as on account of the connection, and not *clothed*, as in our translation) "we shall not be found naked," *i. e.* provided that, when we lay aside this body, we are furnished with another, and not left naked or to perish in the grave.

Then follow the words of the text, in which he repeats the same sentiment, which he had expressed

in the preceding verses, but in a somewhat better and fuller manner. "For we, that are in this tabernacle, do groan being burdened, not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up in life." *To be unclothed* is the same thing as the apostle had before expressed by *this earthly house of our tabernacle being dissolved*, or our dying, and *to be clothed upon* is the *receiving of the house from Heaven*, or the glorified body of the saints, *i. e.* a new life.

The figurative term *unclothed* will probably suggest to some of you the idea of the soul's being disunited from the body, and living in a separate state, and *being clothed upon*, the reunion of these two substances. But this was not the apostle's idea; for according to him the clothes, which are laid aside at death, are the whole man, consisting of an animal frame and an intelligent principle, or the old man, and the clothes, which are assumed at the resurrection, are a new constitution, consisting of the like principles, or a new man. It is the same thing, which he expresses in another part of this chapter, by *being at home in the body*, *i. e.* in the present corruptible system, and by *being absent from the body*, or laying it aside; where the body is put, as is common with all writers, for the whole man, and his meaning is, as if he had said, the present life is accompanied with much toil and many sufferings, which often make us feel oppressed, and weary, and earnestly desirous of a better, not but that the present life has

it's advantages and pleasures, which render us sincerely attached to it and unwilling to part with it, except for another life, in which this mortal existence may for ever be absorbed.

From the preceding elucidation of the apostle's language, I shall take occasion to consider in what the value of human life consists, and on what principles we may desire to have it terminated.

I am first to consist in what the value of human life consists.

It's value, then, may be said to arise from it's being a season of enjoyment. Who can deny, that life has many comforts, who only considers what men derive from the grosser appetites, which are furnished with objects of gratification every day, but especially if he take into his account the satisfaction which men feel in social and domestic relations, pleasures of a more refined nature and within the reach of all—what they receive from the works of nature and art, a high relish for which depends upon the cultivation of the mind, but which is enjoyed in some degree by all—from the knowledge and contemplation of important truths respecting the natural world, civil government, or the common business of life, and especially respecting religion? Nor ought we to leave out of our consideration the pleasures, which arise from the contemplation of moral excellence either in ourselves or others, and particularly in the supreme Being? Who is there, I say, that considers these various sources of delight, that can think

human life is destitute of comfort, and that the continuance of it is not desirable on that account?

Pleasure meets us at our first entrance upon life, at the earliest period of it, and accompanies us at every step in one form or another from the first hour to the last. In general too it is increasing as life advances, being greater in every new period than in the preceding, at least till men are advanced very far in years. The pleasures of infancy and childhood are exchanged for those of manhood, and the pleasures of our manly years for the more refined and enlarged enjoyments of middle life. At every period the mind can enjoy more of the past and anticipate more of the future: at every succeeding period it's pleasures are refined and purified, and partake less of the gross pleasures of sense. If evils be felt, time enables us to correct them; if any thing desirable be wanting, by our own industry and exertion we may supply the defect. In the mean time whether successful or not, hope animates our pursuit and lessens the weight of our troubles, or increases the sum of our enjoyments. If the pleasures of life, then, be at all times considerable and generally increasing, who can wonder, that men are strongly attached to it, and unwilling to depart from it, unless compelled by inexorable necessity?

Secondly, Life is also valuable as a season of improvement.

The whole doctrine of the Christian revelation concurs in teaching us to conceive of a future life as a state of exact retribution, where each will receive

a reward suited to his character, or to that degree of piety and virtue, which he had attained in the present life; he who had made great progress receiving much happiness, while he, who had made but little, proportionally less. Hence appears the value of the present life; for the longer it is continued, the better opportunities will men enjoy for improving and perfecting their characters, and the higher will be their station in Heaven, when they depart from it. On the contrary, those, who die at an early period, before their virtue has attained any degree of maturity, are only qualified for an inferiour station. A good man, therefore, will wish for the continuance of life, not merely on account of the additional pleasures, which it will enable him to enjoy here, but on account of the influence it will have upon the whole of his future existence, by enabling him, when he enters on it, to commence his career of happiness in proportionally better circumstances.

Let it be observed, however, that this can only be true upon the supposition, that all men enter upon happiness at the same time, the period of the resurrection; for, in that case, no one can enjoy any advantage above another, except what he derives from a greater degree of previous preparation. But if the soul of man quit the body as soon as death takes place, and, instead of lying with it in the grave, enter immediately upon a state of improvement, he, who dies soon, may have made between death and the resurrection as great and even greater profici-

ency, than he, who dies later in life; and consequently there can be no motive on this supposition to wish for the continuance of life, since he will rank, at the day of judgment, above those, who shall have died long after him. For it cannot be supposed, that this world affords the same advantages for making religious acquirements as the next, and that ten years spent among frail mortals incumbered with such bodies as ours, can be equal in this respect to ten years spent in Heaven and in the society of the blessed.

Thirdly, There is another reason, for which life is thought valuable, and that is the opportunity it affords of doing good.

It may perhaps be thought, that this consideration might have been classed under one or other of the preceding heads; since doing good is certainly one of the most valuable pleasures of life, and he, who performs good works most frequently, makes the best preparation for a future life, and is likely to hold the highest rank in it.

But there are some, who do good from motives of pure benevolence, and without regard to any advantage resulting to themselves from it either in this world or the next. To them the continuance of life is highly desirable for the sake of those kind services, which they intend to perform for mankind at large or for their relatives and friends, and which they see no probability of being effected in any other way. A few years, they may imagine, will

enable them to accomplish the design they have in view. For this time, at least, they earnestly wish to live, and cannot bear the thought of being prematurely carried away from life, and laid silent and useless in the grave. For such purposes as these, to desire the continuance of life is not only innocent, but rational and commendable.

We are now, Secondly, to consider in what cases it may be allowable to wish life were terminated.

On this subject it may be observed in general, that it is the duty of a creature to be wholly resigned to the will of it's creator, to be pleased with whatever he determines, and to submit without murmuring to what he appoints, in short, to have no will but his. This is no more than the just deference, which is due to the great wisdom and perfect goodness of the supreme Being. It is also recommended to us by an example of the highest authority, no less than that of our master, who, when distressed at the prospect of a violent death, could say, "Father, not my will, but thine be done." To wish to depart from life, then, in any manner, when God does not require such a sacrifice in order to obey his will, can be no proof of excellence of character, nor be properly held up to our imitation as a duty. The utmost that can be said of it is, that it is a weakness, which the distresses of mankind may in certain circumstances render excusable, but which ought to be avoided as far as possible.

We are now to consider what those circumstances are, in which it may be excused.

This may be the case, first, when we are called to very painful and laborious services, which occasion continual anxiety, and exhaust the strength. Of this nature were the labours of Paul. He travelled to every part of the known world to preach the Gospel. And although so benevolent and useful an undertaking must have afforded at times the highest pleasure to a benevolent mind, yet it was accompanied with constant danger and immense fatigue. He was in perils by land, in perils by sea, in perils by false brethren. The history of his mission, as given us by one of his companions as well as by himself, bears ample testimony to the greatness of the hardships he endured. If sometimes, when oppressed with anxiety and exhausted with fatigue, he wished for a release from this service, can we be surprised at the wish? If by being clothed upon he meant a change of a frail constitution of flesh and blood for one that was immortal, without seeing death, as he has predicted will be the case with those, who remain alive at the second coming of Christ, can we wonder, that he should wish his labours and sufferings might be terminated in this manner? Or if by being clothed upon he mean a heavenly constitution, to be received at the resurrection of the dead after many years rest in the grave, what is there in this wish that is very censurable?

Yet in each case he wished for what he knew to be impossible, or what could not be granted; for in respect to this change it could not take place till the last

day, before which period he tells the Thessalonians there must be a great apostacy from the Christian faith; and if he wished for a removal in an ordinary way, this was a favour which could not be granted, for he lived many years after this time.

The circumstances of the apostle were extraordinary, and such as are not likely to occur in the life of a common Christian. If, however, persons of that description should find themselves in a similar situation: if, from the decay of religion or the corruption of Christianity, they should think themselves called upon to make the like painful exertions in the services of God and for the good of mankind, they may be allowed to entertain the same desire, and in the midst of their labours and sufferings to wish an end to them, and that they may be clothed upon with their house from Heaven. But,

Secondly, There are situations in common life, where Christians may be disposed to form the same wish as the apostle.

As for instance, where men are afflicted with violent pain; where there is reason to fear it's continuance, and the agony is greater than human nature can hope to endure with patience; or where old age has destroyed all relish for the enjoyments of life, and the body is also oppressed with disease; where the decay of the faculties of the mind has rendered all attempts at further improvement, and all endeavours to do service to mankind, hopeless. That persons

in these situations should desire, like the apostle, to be discharged from life, if it be only for the rest of the grave, and especially that they should wish to pass from this life to the next without dying, must be allowed to be very natural. For it is at most no more than to prefer ease to pain, and rest to trouble. It is only to desire, that a life, which is at best but frail, and which is now become burdensome and appears to be useless, may be absorbed in one, that is perfectly happy and everlasting. If there be nothing commendable in this, yet surely there is nothing in it to be severely condemned.

From the whole of what has now been said two inferences may be deduced, with which I shall conclude—that in the happiest season of life we should keep ourselves from being too much attached to it, and in the most afflicted not to be ready to indulge discontent.

I. When we are prosperous and happy, when the powers of enjoyment and of service are in full vigour, when our pursuits are successful, bringing with them much present pleasure and giving us the prospect of much more to come—when the face of nature thus smiles upon us, it would be absurd to say, that we groan being burdened; for in these circumstances every man feels himself attached to life and unwilling to part with it. But as it is possible, that life may be taken away even in these favourable circumstances, or a dark cloud be cast over all our future prospects, it is the part of prudence to endeavour to moderate this af-

fection, that we may be able to quit life without murmuring or discontent, if it should be suddenly and unexpectedly destroyed. Nothing can be better calculated for this purpose, than to recollect the superior value of another life, and that, however necessary the present may appear to be to prepare us for the next, and to fix us in the best stations in it, yet God may see, that the longer continuance of this life would be prejudicial to our future interests, by exposing us to temptations and trials, which we should not be able to bear, and, therefore, in mercy remove us from the evil to come. Such considerations as these we ought to make familiar to our minds in the most prosperous seasons, remembering, that the less our circumstances in this world direct our thoughts to death and a future world, the more necessary it is, that we should direct them thither ourselves.

II. The second inference is, that in the worst circumstances we ought not soon to indulge discontent and be weary of life; for God may still have something to be done, some services to be performed for our relatives and friends, or for mankind in general, or some virtue to be acquired or improved, of the necessity of which we are not aware. We are very imperfect judges, when it is proper for us to be tired of life, and to wish for a removal. Let no one, therefore, esteem it a mark of perfection of character, and what we ought to aim at, to wish to die. It is always the wish of ignorance and

impatience, frequently of folly and presumption. It is our duty to be willing to live, while God continues to us the means of doing so, and to leave to him, who disposes of all things, to determine the time of our removal.

SERMON XXXVIII.

ON THE DANGER OF BAD COMPANY.

I COR. XV, 33.

Be not deceived; evil Communications corrupt good Manners.

THE apostle Paul reminds the Corinthians of this maxim, in cautioning them against the insinuations of some profligate persons with whom they kept company, that there was no resurrection of the dead. From such discourse his friends apprehended no danger; but he reminds them of the old proverb, which asserts, that corrupt manners are formed by bad company.

The English word *communications* admits of two meanings; for it may either signify conversations held between one person and another, or personal intercourse between them; but the word used in the original implies the latter rather than the former. It cannot, however, be a matter of much consequence to determine which was the original idea; for they are both closely connected together. Different persons cannot well have personal intercourse with one another without conversation; nor can there be what we understand by conversation without personal intercourse. The design of the apostle was to caution

the Corinthians against the pernicious influence of bad company. I shall hence, therefore, take occasion to consider the reasons which should induce us to avoid the company of immoral men: and there are three which immediately offer themselves to our thoughts. The first is, that this caution is necessary to preserve ourselves from being corrupted by them; the second, that it is necessary to prevent their morals from corrupting others; and the third, that it is the most likely means of their reformation.

I. To avoid the company of men of immoral lives is necessary to preserve ourselves from being corrupted by them.

The motives which tempt us to conform to the manners of those with whom we have intercourse are powerful. There is hardly any thing which one man can do to another more acceptable than to imitate his conduct; for it is the strongest proof he can give that he approves of his behaviour. Were he to declare this in words, it would not be so certain a sign of his approbation; for words may be insincere, whereas actions show more decisively the inward sentiments. By the desire, therefore, which men naturally have to please those with whom they converse, they are tempted to adopt their manners, and vicious manners no less than such as are virtuous; for those who will comply with the vices of their associates find ready admission into their company, and are warmly caressed by them; whereas the stiff and uncomplying are either excluded, or

treated with indifference. The conduct of the latter is regarded as a tacit reprehension upon their companions, as acting contrary to what they think right, and cannot therefore fail to give offence.

Men of corrupt morals indulge their passions without thought, and without restraint, and seize every pleasure and every gratification within their reach, without regard to the means by which they are obtained; but to be virtuous requires some reflection and care, frequent abstinence and self denial. The former, therefore, have more ready imitators than the latter; because it is more easy to indulge the passions than to restrain them.

Example derives much influence from age, rank, wealth, and talents. And although it be highly desirable, that these should always be found on the side of virtue, yet do they often support and recommend vice; in which case the attraction is almost irresistible. To act like the rich, the aged, or the honourable, is thought sufficient to justify any conduct, however otherwise exceptionable. By imitating their manners men not only hope for their favour, but imagine, that they shall acquire something of that consequence which they see annexed to their characters.

But the danger of being corrupted by the society of the wicked arises not solely from the silent influence of example, however powerful; but to this are frequently joined artful solicitations or pressing exhortations, threats of displeasure, or promises of

favour, flattery or ridicule, according as the one or the other may be likely to produce compliance. They have arguments adapted to every age, to every character and disposition. To the young they hold out motives of pleasure; to the aged objects of ambition and interest; to every one, something suited to his taste. Nor will any art be left untried, in order to seduce their companions to follow their example.

Now what man is there, whose virtue is so confirmed and perfect, that he may safely expose himself to such influence? Who can answer for himself, that he shall be proof against such attacks, against the force of example, aided by the hope of pleasure and of gain, by open assaults, or secret artifice? Many, alas! who thought themselves perfectly removed from all danger, and who went into the company of the profligate with a steady purpose of resisting every temptation, have found themselves greatly deceived, and have exhibited to the world melancholy examples of the weakness of human virtue, even where it appeared to be best established. What Solomon has said of the adulterous woman is just as applied to all vice in general, "she hath cast down many wounded, and many strong men have been slain by her. Her house is the way to Hell, going down to the chambers of death."

It is the part of prudence, then, to keep at a distance from an evil which we cannot withstand: our safety lies in flight. Wicked men are afflicted with

a contagious disorder, which will infect all those, who approach them.

II. As a regard to our own safety requires that we should avoid the company of the vicious, so does likewise a regard to the safety of others.

For the same reason that their company is dangerous to us, it must be so to other men: and as they may not have an opportunity of knowing their characters so well as ourselves, and may receive much injury from their society before they are aware, it is but a common act of humanity to warn them of their danger, by pointing them out as persons, with whom they must converse with caution. Something should be done to mark our abhorrence of their crimes, and to show how dangerous in our apprehension they are to the world: and no way seems more easy and natural for this purpose, than avoiding their company, and refusing to have that familiar intercourse with them, which we maintain with men of better character. This is a duty, which every man owes to society, the welfare of which we are bound to endeavour to promote; and nothing can discover more clearly an indifference to the interests of virtue and the want of public spirit, than when men, whose vices are notorious, are treated with the same respect as the most exalted characters. This, it must be acknowledged, is too much the temper of the present times, when vice lifts up it's shameless front in the midst of society, without any mark of disapprobation.

It may here be asked perhaps, whether, as we are

to avoid familiar intercourse with men of vicious character, because their vices are pernicious, we ought not for the same reason to shun the company of those, who entertain erroneous principles; because those principles may likewise be pernicious. To this I answer, that it is by men's conduct and not by their principles, that we are to be guided in our behaviour toward them: if that be unexceptionable, they deserve to be treated with kindness and respect, whatever their principles may be. Principles may, no doubt, have a tendency to do mischief, by corrupting the morals of those by whom they are embraced; but if they do not actually produce that effect, there is no ground for avoiding their society.

The proper method of opposing pernicious tenets is by reason and argument, and not by shunning the company of those, by whom they are believed; for this will be considered as arising from a fear of finding that to be truth we thought errour, and from a consciousness of being unable to oppose the latter, which will make an unfavourable impression on the minds of those, who observe our conduct. The best evidence we can give of our candour and impartiality is by associating, with equal freedom, with virtuous men of all religious persuasions, that we may thus hear what each has to offer fully and fairly stated. Nor can any objection be made to this from any danger of having our morals corrupted; for the great principles of morality are maintained by every religious sect, and the conduct of individuals belonging

to each is equally unexceptionable. Whatever may be the real *tendency* of principles, they do not always *produce* the evils, which we apprehend or fear. They are either held too lightly to operate upon the conduct, or something else is maintained with them, which counteracts their effects. We cannot, therefore, conclude men to be bad, because their principles are false or pernicious: nor ought we on this account alone to avoid their company.

Besides, were differences of religious opinion a just ground for preventing friendly intercourse, it would destroy all harmony in society; for there is no one, who does not think the principles which are opposite to his own to be pernicious. But a maxim, which sets all men at variance, can never be a maxim of Christianity, which was intended to unite them in the bonds of friendship, or be approved by the common father of all mankind, who must wish his children to live together in love and peace. Thus it is we reason in regard to Christians of different religious sentiments; and he is deemed a narrow minded bigot, who thinks otherwise. But it may be supposed, that the same rules do not extend to those, who have renounced Christianity and become unbelievers. By giving up the Gospel of Christ, it may be said, they have given up the only good foundation of morals, and adopted principles, which can neither afford comfort, nor lead to a virtuous conduct. Such men, some may imagine, ought to be shunned, not only as the enemies of Christ, but as

the common enemies of all mankind. But it should be remembered, that several unbelievers (although it is by no means always or generally the case) have been men of unexceptionable morals, which in them may be the effect of early habits, that continue to operate, when the cause, which first produced them, a belief in the Christian religion, is removed. Where this is the case there can be no danger of associating with such men, but what arises from their principles, and against these every Christian is, or rather ought to be well guarded. To avoid all society with unbelievers in the common intercourse of life would give them the idea of a great want of liberality on the part of Christians, or of a great fear of hearing what they can offer in defence of their principles, either of which will give them an unfavourable opinion of Christianity itself, an effect which ought, if possible, to be prevented. Besides, how are Deists to become acquainted with the evidence, upon which the Christian religion is founded, or what probability is there, that they will ever be reclaimed from their errours, if there be no intercourse between them and Christians? One of the charges brought against our master was, that he kept company with publicans and sinners; in which place by sinners we are not to understand men of immoral lives, but Gentiles, whom the Jews, the peculiar people of God, called by that name. If Jesus, therefore, admitted unconverted Gentiles into his company, in order to make them proselytes

to his religion, or to communicate to them religious instructions, Christians need not scruple associating with unbelievers of the present day for the like purpose. I have said the more upon this subject, because it is of great consequence to the credit of our Christian profession, to know how to behave ourselves toward infidels. As men of good moral character they are entitled to the same respect as professed Christians of the same character; and it is particularly desirable to avoid all harsh unkind behaviour, that nothing may unnecessarily prejudice them against our religion.

The rule, which has now been laid down for regulating the conduct of individuals toward one another, ought also to be observed by Christian societies toward their members. If they behave themselves well, they are to treat them as friends and brethren; but where their conduct is disorderly and irregular, they are required to disown all connection with them, and to discard them from their society. "I wrote unto you an Epistle," says Paul, "not to company with fornicators, yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then ye must needs go out of the world," *i. e.* not to avoid heathens of this character entirely, for that was impossible while they remained in the world, "but now I have written unto you, that, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extor-

tioner, with such a one, no not to eat," *i. e.* not in Christian communion at the Lord's Supper.

Thirdly, To avoid the company of the vicious is necessary for *their* good, as the means of their reformation.

Those, who commit crimes, are often not aware of their enormity, and mix with the world, as if nothing had taken place; but when they find they are avoided by all the wise and virtuous, this makes them sensible of the greatness of their offences, and awakens their minds to repentance and reformation: whereas, were they received as usual in society notwithstanding their offences, they would continue to think little of them. The treatment of which I have been speaking, therefore, is necessary discipline for their reformation like other punishments; it is punishment, however, which requires to be used with caution and judgment. For all offenders are not to be immediately abandoned and never again noticed: that would drive them to despair, and compel them to associate with persons like themselves, who would soon make them much worse than they are at present. With what kind of vicious characters it may be proper to keep company, must depend upon the degree of wickedness they have contracted. Some men are so far gone in a course of vice, that there is no hope of reforming them; their habits are so fixed, that there is no prospect of producing a change by ordinary means. Such persons are much more likely by social intercourse to corrupt, than to be mended by

the good. The habits of vice are much more strongly fixed in the former, than the habits of virtue in the latter: and, where two forces of different degrees of strength are brought into contest, the weaker must yield to the stronger. It is matter of prudence to avoid the company of persons confirmed in vice, as being dangerous to those who associate with them, and also because such characters are incapable of receiving benefit. But young offenders are not so incorrigible. The seeds of virtue still remain in their minds, and may yet be made to spring forth by proper treatment; nor can any thing be more effectual for this purpose than the society of good men, who may teach them what is right, and by kindness and persuasion induce them to practise it. To withdraw from them immediately is to leave them in the hands of their wicked companions, and by an appearance of severity and harshness may drive them still farther from their duty. Tenderness and compassion toward offenders are often the best means of reclaiming them, while a different treatment only hastens their progress in the paths of wickedness.

The anxiety, which some persons discover to avoid the company of sinners, proceeds not so much from a love of virtue and a desire to discountenance vice, as from an affectation of nice feeling, which the least deviation from the path of virtue offends. A truly genuine and enlightened zeal for the recovery of virtue and innocence, where they have been lost, would lead them to acts of kindness rather than of

severity; or, if they produced a temporary estrangement in order to mark their displeasure at vice, would soon induce them to return into the usual channel of kind offices. The heart of man yields to kindness and persuasion; but is hardened by rough treatment. From the whole of what has been said upon this last head of discourse we are to conclude, that our conduct toward those, who offend against the rules of morality, must be determined by the nature of the case. If the offence be of a light nature, it ought to receive some mark of displeasure by reproof, remonstrance, and a temporary withdrawing from the company of the offender; if of a more heinous nature, that displeasure ought to be more strongly expressed by withdrawing for a longer time, although not perhaps entirely, whilst there is hope of reformation; but where it is in itself so enormous, or so often repeated, as to discover strong habits of vice, it is our duty to abandon the offender wholly and for ever; for he is not likely to be reclaimed, and our own virtue, instead of producing any good in him, is likely to be itself contaminated.

We have now seen what our duty is in respect to keeping company with the wicked, and upon what grounds our duty is founded. Let us henceforth be careful to practise it, which however is not so easy a matter, and requires all the resolution and fortitude which we can exert.

Is there any one, then, of your friends or acquaintance, who habitually violates some plain and

obvious duty? is he often intoxicated with liquor, and addicted to drunkenness? does he ever violate the rules, which the Christian religion and the common good have established for the mutual intercourse of the sexes? does he waste his substance in riotous living? does he spend his time in idleness, leaving his family unprovided for, and contract debts, which he is not able to discharge? does he show a disregard to truth by lying? has he betrayed a trust committed to him, or is he dishonest in his dealings? is there any of your acquaintance, who has been guilty of all or any one of these offences? Forsake his company; associate with him no longer; make him not your familiar friend. First remonstrate with him in the plainest terms, and in the most affectionate manner, upon the guilt and danger of his conduct; if remonstrances prove successful, you have gained your brother, but if he still persist in the same vicious course, break off all connection with him immediately. He may be endeared to you by the ties of blood or kindred, by many years acquaintance, by long intercourse, by many amiable qualities and shining accomplishments; but these considerations ought to have no weight with you, when placed in competition with your own virtue and peace. A regard to your own safety, as well as to the public good and to the welfare of the individual, require from you this sacrifice. The experience of past ages, confirmed by the observation of every day, has shown that men's characters are formed by their con-

nections. Hence the maxim, " show me the company a man keeps, and I will tell you his character." And Solomon says, " Can a man touch pitch, and not be defiled? can he take coals into his bosom, and not be burnt?"

In order to induce you to continue with him and to imitate his conduct, he may talk to you of the pleasures he enjoys from indulging his passions, and setting himself free from all restraint; he may boast of the number of his friends and of the gains of his evil practices, and press you to come and partake of the booty: but listen not to his voice; it is not the voice of a friend, but the insidious proposal of an enemy; he wants to sanction his own folly by the authority of your example, and to cover his own disgrace by involving you in it. Be assured from the experience of mankind and the language of Scripture, that vice and misery are inseparably connected together: it is an invariable law of nature, that he, who indulges himself in the one, must experience the other. " Wherefore, my son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not; walk not in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path. He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed."

I would press this advice with particular earnestness upon my young friends. Your danger is great; your manners and habits are yet unformed, and will easily take a cast from those, with whom you associate, and whom you make your familiar friends. You

are at present not sufficiently aware of the force of example, and may, therefore, receive from it irreparable injury before you perceive your danger. Take the advice of those of more advanced life, who know it's influence and have seen some of it's dreadful effects, if you pay any regard to their opinion. There never was a time, when it was more necessary to guard you against the danger of evil company than the present moment. The more freely men associate together, the more likely are they to be seduced by bad example. Be very careful whom you first choose for your companions, and whom you continue in that number. If any one of your acquaintance appear to be addicted to any species of vice, avoid his company, cultivate no intercourse with him. He is a dangerous person, whom you cannot approach without being injured. If any one, who once appeared to be virtuous, and with whom you have been accustomed to associate, should decline from the path of virtue, warn him with the sincerity and earnestness of a friend of the danger which awaits him, and declare plainly, that, great as is your regard for him, attention to your own safety will require you to forsake him. If notwithstanding your warnings and reproofs he still persevere in the same wicked way, you have but one step more to take, and about which you ought not to hesitate a moment, and that is to break off all intercourse with him for ever.

Let persons of every age and every condition re-

member their obligation to mark vice with their disapprobation, wherever they meet with it, from a regard to the public good; by warnings and reproofs where they can be given, and on all occasions by their actions, particularly by shunning the company of the vicious. They may hereby lose the favour of some, who are capable of doing them essential service as to worldly concerns, and incur the displeasure of others, who are not very scrupulous about the justice of the means they employ to gratify their resentment; they may be ridiculed as precise, and hated as morose Christians; but they will have discharged an important duty, which they owe to the world, and must look for the reward of the sacrifice, which they have made, to the reflections of their own minds and the recompense of a future life.

Were all good men thus to unite together to encourage one another and to discountenance vice, it could not fail to restrain it's progress. Young men, who are at present afraid to do right, would acquire more courage, and those who are further advanced in life would not find such strong temptation to desert the company they have joined. We should not then find vice walking abroad without shame in open day, nor virtue hiding itself from view for fear of censure; but they would both resume their proper stations—vice would skulk into obscurity and darkness, and virtue shine forth in all it's genuine lustre before the light of Heaven.

SERMON XXXIX.

A DISCOURSE DELIVERED AT TAUNTON, SEPT. 3, 1793, BEFORE THE SOCIETY OF UNITARIAN CHRISTIANS, ESTABLISHED IN THE WEST OF ENGLAND, FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE AND THE PRACTICE OF VIRTUE BY THE DISTRIBUTION OF BOOKS.

MATTHEW xiii, 33.

Another Parable spake he unto them: The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto Leaven, which a Woman took and hid in three Measures of Meal, till the Whole was leavened.

CHRIST delivered this parable for the encouragement of his disciples. He had been employed in instructing them in the nature of the kingdom which he came to establish, and had already sent them out to announce it's approach. But the apostles, apprehending it to be of a temporal nature, and imagining, in common with the rest of their countrymen, that all extraordinary divine favours were to be confined to the Jews, never conceived that this kingdom was to be extended beyond the limits of Judæa: nor could they see that there was much probability of it's arriving even at this degree of extent. Twelve men, such as they were, without learning, power, or

authority, seemed but ill qualified for spreading the new doctrine throughout so large a country, in opposition to established opinions, and all the influence of the great: still less did they appear prepared for propagating it throughout the world. They, who were reprehended so often for their want of faith in other instances, would probably feel no great confidence in regard to this subject, where, according to human apprehension, there appeared to be so little prospect of success. To strengthen their hopes of the general prevalence of the Gospel, Jesus assures them, that, as in the natural world great changes arise from small and inconsiderable causes, a little leaven pervading and fermenting a large mass, so it would likewise be in regard to his doctrine and the number of his disciples; that the doctrine should spread, until it was diffused over every quarter of the globe, and his disciples increase from a small and inconsiderable number, until they included the whole human race.

This parable, therefore, may be considered as prophetical, foretelling a grand event, which has not yet been accomplished, but will one day certainly take place, the universal prevalence of the Christian religion; of which we have likewise clear intimations in the prophetical writings of Scripture. The stone, which smote Nebuchadnezzar's image, and was intended to represent a kingdom the God of Heaven would set up, "is to become a great mountain, and to fill the whole earth," Dan. ii, 34, 35.

14. The prophet Isaiah tells us, " that it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills, and all nations shall flow unto it," Is. ii, 2: and Malachi, " that from the rising of the sun even to the going down of the same, the name of God shall be great among the Gentiles," Mal. i, 11.

The language of Christ in the text may be considered not only as prophetical of a great event, but likewise as intimating in what manner it is to be accomplished; not instantaneously and tumultuously, but gradually and secretly, as that substance operates, to which the kingdom of Heaven is compared: for when Christ has recourse to the same simile upon another occasion, there is evidently an allusion to this property, Mat. xvi, 6, where, cautioning his disciples against the doctrines of the two prevailing sects among the Jews, he tells them " to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees," intimating, that their doctrine was not only pernicious, but also of a subtle and insinuating nature, pervading men's minds before they were aware. In like manner Christ may here intend to declare, that the advancement of his religion in the world would be by imperceptible degrees, until it had extended itself throughout the whole mass of mankind. The progress both of truth and errour is nearly alike; but there is this difference between them, the spreading of the one is partial and tem-

porary; that of the other, universal and eternal—the one reaches to one portion of the globe, or to one age of the world; the other to every country under Heaven, and to every future period of time.

Such, we have reason to hope, will be the issue of things in regard to those two important truths, the unity of the divine Being and the humanity of Christ. God has (for reasons which are no doubt wise and good, though not obvious to us) suffered these doctrines to be corrupted and lost, in almost every part of the Christian world. The virtuous struggles of those, who have attempted to withstand the progress of errour, or to restore the original truth, have proved both alike unsuccessful. The advocates for a plurality of gods, or of objects of religious worship, have long had and still continue to have on their side the weight of numbers, the influence of riches, and the power of civil government; while the defenders of the strict unity of God are few, despised, and persecuted. In this country, in particular, they are liable, for making an open profession of their sentiments, to penalties, which rank them with apostates from the Christian faith, and, if enforced, would deprive them of the best rights of society.

But the benevolence of the divine Being will not, we have reason to believe, permit him to suffer things to remain in this condition—to let truth be thus degraded and errour triumphant. A period will certainly come for the revival of the truth, and for

diffusing it again throughout the world. Permit me to hope for your indulgence, while I endeavour to show, that that period is probably arrived—I say *probably* arrived, for so little capable are we of interpreting the divine purposes from any present appearances, that it would be presumption in us to pretend to be *certain* of the immediate approach of such an event. It will be sufficient to justify our expectations of it, if circumstances be more promising than at any former period; which I shall now attempt to prove. Should this be satisfactorily demonstrated, it will open a pleasing prospect to an infant society, which is formed principally with the view of spreading the knowledge of the important truths before mentioned, and furnish each individual of our body with powerful encouragement for exertion.

The expectation, that the doctrine of the humanity of Christ will speedily prevail in the world, seems to be justified by the simplicity to which it is now reduced; by the conduct of those, who embrace it, in making an open profession of their faith; and by the temper and circumstances of their opponents.

More than two hundred years have now elapsed since this important doctrine was revived in the Christian world. About the period of the Reformation from Popery, there appeared several learned and able advocates, who ventured to defend it, and drew after them many followers. Separate churches of persons, who professed this principle, were formed

in different parts of Europe, but more especially in Poland, whither they were induced to resort, on account of the religious liberty, which they were permitted to enjoy in that kingdom. Persons of the first rank in society among the Poles joined themselves to them, or afforded them protection. Their societies became numerous, and they seemed to have obtained a lasting establishment, but this flourishing state of things did not continue long. A decree was obtained by their enemies for banishing them all from the kingdom, which was executed with the greatest severity. Their societies were broken up, and the members obliged to take refuge in other countries. From this period permanent congregations of believers in the humanity of Christ, notwithstanding several attempts to establish them, have been, until the present times, unknown in Europe, if we except a few churches in Prussia and Transylvania, which are said to have subsisted there from the time of the Reformation. Some individuals, however, dispersed through different countries, still continued to maintain this doctrine; but as a distinct sect of Christians having separate places of worship they had no existence*.

* Mosheim's Eccl. Hist. Vol. IV, p. 178, &c. Vol. V, p. 51, &c.

Ab eo tempore (scil. 1658) maximè in Transylvania scita sua publicè propagarunt; sed & aliis locis partim tectiores, partim apertè nostrâ ætate commendarunt sententias suas. Schroeckhii Hist. Reip. et Eccl. Christ. 1785. p. 299.

As the first attempt, in modern times, to propagate the doctrine of the divine unity and the huma-

A gentleman well acquainted with the German language has favoured me with the following account of the Unitarians of Prussia and Transylvania, translated from Schlegel's Eccles. Hist. of the eighteenth century, published in German at Heilbron, in 1788, in two Volumes 8vo.

The history of the Antitrinitarians of the present century is rather the history of individuals, and of the places and countries where they have propagated their doctrines, than of the creed they profess, which, in the main, continues unaltered. In Poland, their ancient residence, they were formerly very numerous, but, at present, owing to their congregations having in the last century been dispersed and broken up, their number is very small, and these few, to avoid punishment, must keep themselves private. In Prussia (whither they emigrated from the adjoining Poland) they have still two congregations; at Rudau, in the district of Rhein, and at Andreaswalde, in the district of Johannisburg, which are rather decreasing than increasing. One minister, whose salary is very scanty, serves both churches, and performs divine service in the room of a private dwelling house; for they must avoid all appearance of publicly exercising their religion. Both congregations are reckoned to consist of barely a hundred souls. Some eminent families are, however, of their number, as the Schlichting family, the Morstin, and others.

The Socinians (or as they rather call themselves) the Unitarians of Transylvania have had, since the sixteenth century, the free exercise of their religion confirmed by the laws of the land. They are governed by Superintendants. Under the Superintendant Michael Almasi, the church of Clausenburg, which had been granted them by Prince John the 2d, in 1570, was, with their college and printing office, taken from them in 1716, by order of the Emperor Charles the 6th, and given to the Jesuits. At the same time they were deprived of their very flourishing

nity of Christ was thus defeated, it may be apprehended, that we have no better prospect of success at the present moment: and this apprehension would appear to be well founded, if we were placed, in like circumstances, and had the same difficulties to contend with as they had. But if it can be shown, that many former obstacles are removed, and that we enjoy several advantages for propagating the truth, which our predecessors had not, the want of success on past occasions can furnish no just ground for despair now.

The decline of this sect of Christians, after having been in so flourishing a condition, has been attributed to the violent methods which were employed to check the growth of their principles, all parties, Papists, Calvinists, and Lutherans, uniting their efforts

church and school at Weissemburg. The present Superintendant is the eighteenth Transylvanian Superintendant; he is an upright and humane man, and daily teaches divinity in the college of the Unitarians, who even now have good schools both here and at Torda. They still enjoy the free exercise of their religion, but are not now admitted to posts of honour as formerly, when they belonged to the Grand Council for managing the affairs of the land, and to other courts of justice. Their chief teachers in churches and schools study in foreign universities; especially in Holland, where they have many friends, particularly among the Remonstrants. Their number even now is estimated at thirty thousand souls. Their present creed does not differ from that which the Polish Unitarians laid before Frederic I, King of Prussia. That party which rejected the worship of Christ is not now to be found among them.

against them as a common enemy, and having recourse to the most savage barbarities, which ever stained the hands of persecutors; but to inflict tortures and death upon men for their religious principles has been hitherto found to strengthen the attachment of survivors rather than weaken it, and to increase the number of proselytes, rather than diminish them. A better reason for this decline may, I apprehend, be found in the principles maintained by them.

The most distinguished leader of this class of Christians, from whom they have been denominated, because supposed to embrace his sentiments, had joined to his idea of Christ being a man, while in the world, certain notions of his exaltation and dignity after his ascension into Heaven, totally irreconcileable with the first part of his hypothesis; and such as raised one, whom he esteemed to be a man, to a level with the supreme Being. It is well known, that Socinus considered Christ in Heaven as invested with absolute power over all men, and over every part of the universe, for every purpose, that might be connected with the prosperity of the church in general or of individual members; and that he regarded him as a proper object of religious worship, to whom we might address petitions for such mercies as we want, and thanksgiving for those we have received*.

* Toulmin's Mem. of Socinus, p. 179, 180, ibid. 200, 208.

This part of his system must strike thinking persons as attended with great difficulties, and create insurmountable obstacles to it's reception. I shall give you the opinion of two eminent persons on this subject, as they delivered them at the distance of near a century from each other; the one a clergyman of the church of England, possessed of the highest ecclesiastical dignity which this country affords; the other a Dissenting Minister, by no means inferiour to him in talents, virtue and reputation; the one an Arian, the other a believer in the doctrine of the Trinity.

"Let us now see," says Archbishop Tillotson, "whether the opinion of our adversaries hath not greater difficulties in it, and more palpable absurdities following from it. They say, that the Son of God is a mere creature; not God by nature, and yet truly and really God by office, and by divine appointment and constitution; to whom the very same honour and worship is to be given, which we give to him who is God by nature.

"And can they discern no difficulty, no absurdity in this? What, no absurdity in bringing idolatry by a backdoor into the Christian religion? one main design whereof was to banish idolatry out of the world; and will they in earnest contest this matter with us, that the giving divine worship to a mere creature is not idolatry? and can they vindicate themselves in this point any other way, than will, in a great measure, acquit the Pagans and Papists from the charge of idolatry?

"What, no absurdity in a God, as it were, of yesterday? in a creature God? in a God merely by positive institution? and this in opposition to a plain moral precept of eternal obligation, and to the fixed and immutable nature of things? so that, to avoid the shadow and appearance of a plurality of deities, they really run into it; and, for aught I can see, into downright idolatry, by worshipping a creature besides the Creator, who is blessed for ever*."

So forcibly does the Archbishop reason against the system of Socinus in regard to the worship of Jesus Christ, without being aware, that the like objections might be urged with equal force against his own faith.

To suppose that a man, made as no other man was, for performing no other service than what a man might have performed, should be exalted above every creature in the universe, should reign over all nature, and become the proper object of religious worship, is, in the apprehension of Dr. Price, an advancement so sudden and astonishing, that there is nothing in Athanasianism itself more extravagant. This doctrine, according to him, not only renders the Scriptures unintelligible, but Christianity itself incredible†.

Can we wonder then, that a system, attended,

* Tillotson's Works, Vol. I, Serm. 44, p. 429.

† Serm. on the Christ. Doctr. p. 128, 146, 150, 151.

in the judgment of thinking men of opposite religious persuasions, with so great difficulties, should find few who were prepared to embrace it at a period, when philosophy and learning had dawned upon the world, and when men began to exercise their reason even in religous matters? Can we be surprised, if perceiving objections of nearly equal weight to two systems of faith, they should choose to retain that in which they had been educated, and which appeared to be most honourable to the Saviour?

Let us compare the doctrine in regard to Christ, which has been just stated, with that of the Unitarians of the present day—that Jesus Christ possessed the same nature as other men, if he was not produced by the same natural means; that he was superiour to the prophets who went before him, in the perfection of his example, in the purity of his precepts, and in the extraordinary divine communications of knowledge and power that were made to him; and that, after his resurrection and ascension, he was exalted to a state of glory and honour in Heaven, but without any share in the government of the world or the church, except by means of his laws; and we shall see nothing here, which shocks our understanding by it's absurdity and inconsistency, nothing which obliges us to have recourse to *mystery* or the *weakness of human reason* to defend it, the usual refuge of men, who have to vindicate what is contradictory or incomprehensible; but, on the contrary, what is intelligible and plain to the most or-

dinary understanding, perfectly corresponding with the past dispensations of religion to mankind, and with the future designs of Providence respecting good men. We have a prophet, like, in every respect, to other prophets, except in the superiority of his character and endowments, who is rewarded, after death, for his distinguished services, as some of them were without dying. Such a system as this is calculated to attract alike the attention and gain the approbation of the philosopher, who, disgusted with the absurd doctrines maintained by Christians, is hastening toward Deism, or has already fallen into it; of the unlearned Christian, who is not prepared to build his faith upon the subtleties of metaphysics; and of every man, who, in receiving articles of belief, is guided by the principles of reason, and not by the influence of education or authority. Such a system as this is likely to prevail in the world, if simplicity and consistency be any recommendation of a religious doctrine.

However, it is not merely because it is more agreeable to reason, that we have ground to hope for the prevalence of the doctrine of the Humanity of Christ as it is now maintained, but likewise because it has been rendered more consonant to the language of the Scriptures. Much light has been thrown upon these sacred writings since the period of the Reformation, when this doctrine was revived, which has removed many former objections, and produced much fresh evidence in it's support. By comparing together

the various manuscript copies of the New Testament, learned men have detected several corruptions of the original text, in favour of the reigning system. The peculiar phraseology of Scripture, in regard to the person and office of Christ, has been more completely illustrated; not from the language of common life in modern times, by which men had been hitherto misled, but from the style of the East, and particularly from that of the sacred writers themselves. Texts of Scripture have been interpreted, not like so many independent sentences, as was frequently practised before, but from the general scope of the writer, which is the only proper method of ascertaining his meaning. By these means, and by more acurate translations of the original language, many passages of Scripture, which were once supposed to contain the strongest evidence of the Deity or preexistence of Christ, and which occasioned no small perplexity and embarrassment to the advocates for the opposite doctrine, have been shown to afford no proof of either, but, on the contrary, to be perfectly consistent with the idea of his being a man. What hopes of success may be derived from achievements of this kind it is unnecessary to point out. We are in possession of all the strong holds once occupied by our adversaries. They are driven from the fortresses, to which they principally trusted for defence, and rendered incapable of making any further effectual resistance.

We possess another advantage also over our pre-

decessors in this cause, which, as it will greatly facilitate the reception of the truth, deserves to be separately mentioned. If the doctrine of the humanity of Christ be the doctrine of the New Testament, it must have been the opinion of all those, who were instructed by the apostles and first teachers of Christianity. And, as a large body of people do not change their opinions at once, nor without making some opposition, we might expect to find some traces of the original doctrine in early ages, and some evidence of the opposition made to those, who were attempting to introduce novelties. Agreeably to this expectation, it has been lately discovered by a distinguished individual, to whose indefatigable researches after truth, both in the natural and moral world, we are greatly indebted, that the Christians of the first ages after Christ were Unitarians in sentiment, and that it was a long time before the common people, or unlearned Christians, who are always the last to receive new opinions, could be induced to receive a doctrine bearing any resemblance to the modern notion of the Trinity. The source of this ancient and grand corruption of Christianity has also been traced, and shown to have originated in the prevailing philosophy of the times.

Since, then, we have reason, Scripture, and antiquity on our side, what ground can we have to fear any opposition, or to doubt the success of the cause, in which we are engaged? Had Protestants any better encouragement, when they separated

from the church of Rome? Had *they* any stronger arguments to plead, than *we* have to offer? Has not the event fully justified them in concluding, that gross corruptions of the Gospel could not long withstand the principles of sound reasoning and the plain language of Revelation? And have not we good reason at the present day (in attempting a like reformation in religion) for making the same conclusion; especially when we enjoy the additional advantage to be derived from the example of their success?

Secondly, Good hopes of the prevalence of Unitarian principles may also be derived from the conduct of those who embrace them, in making an open profession of the truth.

That there has been a backwardness on the part of believers in the humanity of Christ to do this, cannot be denied; which may be attributed to various causes: thus, it may have proceeded, in many instances, from the want of a firm persuasion of the truth of that, which they were called to profess; and this again from the great difficulties with which they found themselves heretofore embarrassed; for what men do not believe with confidence, they cannot profess with boldness, or be anxious to communicate to others. Slight obstacles, and especially the fear of danger or reproach, are in this case sufficient to repress their zeal. While some concealed their sentiments from doubts still existing in their minds about the truth of them, and from the fear of suffering, others have done it from motives of policy, conceiv-

ing that the cause of truth is hurt by a hasty disclosure, and that it is best promoted by keeping it back from the world, until men's prejudices are removed, and they can hear it without disgust. According to the apprehension of these, new opinions must be communicated to the world with infinite caution, as men are able to bear them; and the time was by no means yet come for being explicit upon this subject. Others again, observing that there are virtuous characters of equal excellence among men of different religious persuasions, have imagined, that it is of little consequence to Christians, what they believe in regard to what they call speculative opinions; that in respect to the subject, of which we are now speaking in particular, it is a matter of indifference as to moral improvement, whether men conceive Jesus Christ to be God, equal in every respect to the Father, a great preexistent spirit, or only a man; whether they perform religious worship to one being, to two, or to three; and consequently, that although they have no doubt in their own mind what the truth is, they have considered themselves at liberty to publish or conceal it, as they thought proper. From these motives many persons have, for a long time past, satisfied their minds with obtaining themselves the knowledge of what they deemed the truth, and taken no pains or shown little zeal to communicate it to their brethren. Such opinions as those now mentioned have proved a great obstruction to the progress of more liberal principles in religion, and

afforded much advantage to those, who denied and opposed them; for persons of the latter description, generally conceiving of the peculiar articles of their faith as necessary to the salvation of mankind, and therefore of infinite moment, have esteemed themselves bound to profess and inculcate them with proportional earnestness. And in a contest of this kind, where one party is lukewarm or absolutely indifferent to the cause which they espouse, but the other is animated with the highest zeal, it is easy to perceive which will be the more successful one in gaining proselytes.

But more generous principles have been adopted by Unitarians of modern times, respecting the importance of their sentiments, and their obligation to communicate them freely to the world. They regard the knowledge of truth in general as valuable, on account of the necessary connection which it has with the happiness of the human race, and religious truth as more so than any other, from it's influence in promoting the moral improvement and comfort of mankind. Every just notion in religion, however inconsiderable it may appear, they consider in the same important light as the philosopher views every new discovery in natural science, who regards it as important in itself or in it's consequences, either enabling him to exercise new powers over the material world, and thereby add to the enjoyments, or lessen the evils of human life, or leading him to the discovery of other useful truths, to which it may stand

related. In the same manner, they consider every religious truth as valuable, either on account of the direct influence which it has in advancing the happiness of the human race, or from it's connection with other truths, which have that tendency. And since one truth and one errour is connected with another in endless progression, they regard it as the duty of every man, who would prove himself a friend to mankind, and wishes to further the benevolent designs of Providence, to inquire after and communicate truth, to detect and expose errour, by all the means in his power; it becomes him, with this view, to make a public profession of what he believes to be true, as one of the most effectual means of calling the attention of mankind to his sentiments, and of inducing men to embrace them; and to make this profession in the clearest manner, without any ambiguity or reserve, by words or actions, or both, as the case may require, in the face of all opposition, and to whatever evils and dangers the explicit avowal of the truth may expose him. To communicate the truth partially is, in their estimation, to do it injury, and to obstruct, rather than promote it's progress; since it is never likely to be so well received as when it is fully known: to be deterred by the fear of danger from publishing any doctrine which we believe to be true, or a part of the Gospel of Christ, is to prefer our own ease or safety to the general good of mankind, and to incur the guilt of being ashamed of Christ before men.

These sentiments, concerning religious truth in general, are accompanied with a conviction of the particular importance of the doctrine of the Divine Unity, which they consider as the fundamental principle both of the Jewish and Christian religion; conceiving that to offer divine worship, or to ascribe divine attributes to a creature, is a branch of that gross corruption of religion, which, in Scripture, is stigmatised with the appellation of idolatry; the introduction of which, in whatever form, has been the source of unspeakable mischiefs to the world. They are convinced, that to the deification and worship of Jesus Christ, they are to attribute the worship of Mary the mother of Jesus, the worship of angels, the worship of dead men and women without number, and last of all, the worship of a piece of bread, with an infinite number of superstitious rites and ceremonies, which such worship drew after it; that this one errour, therefore, has been the principal source of all the other errours of the church of Rome.

While they entertain this opinion of the importance of truth, they find room for the exercise of candour toward those who are in errour. They are persuaded that mistakes, which are involuntary, cannot be criminal, and that those, who have fallen into them after diligent and impartial inquiry, are not the objects of divine wrath, but of tender compassion, and ought to be regarded with the same compassion by all those who are better informed. Every deviation from the truth must indeed be inju-

rious to the happiness of men; but all deviations are not equally so, much less are all to be regarded as fatal to their everlasting welfare. A few important truths, firmly believed and carefully attended to, will counteract the destructive tendency of many errours.

From men, who entertain such opinions of the nature of truth in general, and of the importance of the doctrine of the divine Unity in particular, we may expect every exertion, which can be necessary to make it generally received by the world. For in such persons we find a firm conviction of the truth, an open profession of it in spite of all obstacles, and an earnest zeal for it's propagation—a zeal too, not founded in vanity and the love of distinction, which excites disgust against the cause which it is employed to support, but proceeding from a generous concern for the welfare of the human race, and therefore amiable and conciliating.

But thirdly, the hope of success to the principles we support may be derived, as well from the temper and circumstances of our opponents, as from those of our friends and fellow labourers.

Books upon every branch of science are multiplied. The number of readers is increasing. Knowledge must, therefore, be advancing and becoming more generally diffused. These are circumstances, which cannot fail to prove favourable to the cause which we have espoused: for men, who have been accustomed to exercise their reason upon one subject, will employ the same faculty in investigating another,

if their attention should be directed toward it; and whenever they do this, there can be no doubt of the issue of their inquiries. The fear of losing the rich emoluments of an establishment, or of incurring the disgrace of being connected with a small and despised party, is indeed a strong temptation to avoid enquiry and to suppress the result of it. But we know from several recent examples, that these obstacles, powerful as they may be, are not sufficient to withstand the force of genuine virtue and integrity. We have seen persons resign honourable and lucrative situations in the church, because they could not join in worship addressed to any being besides the one God, and expose themselves to poverty and contempt, with all the fortitude of primitive Confessors. These are noble instances of the influence of truth on the human mind, and will no doubt induce many others to follow so excellent a pattern.

That state of things is the most unfavourable to the speedy progress of truth, in which the efforts of those who support it are viewed with perfect indifference; when their arguments are deemed so absurd or so impious, as to be incapable of doing mischief, or as not to deserve notice, and when therefore no opposition is made to them. In vain is it, in this case, that men preach, or write, or speak, in behalf of what they regard as important doctrines: they gain no attention, and can make no impression. But this is not the light, in which the doctrine, of which I have been speaking, is regarded at the pre-

sent day. The writings of Unitarians, published in defence of their own principles, or for overthrowing those of their opponents, are read with attention by great numbers. Their arguments are deemed at least plausible, and endeavours are made to answer them. Persons of no inconsiderable eminence, for their talents, learning, or rank, have thought it an employment not unworthy of them to engage in this controversy, with a view to stop the progress of what they regard as dangerous errour. The contests, which this opposition occasions, attract the attention of the world to the subject under discussion, and enable spectators to judge, while each party labours to exhibit his own opinion to most advantage, which is supported by the greatest strength of evidence, and which has truth on it's side.

No inconsiderable symptoms have lately appeared of a disposition to employ force to suppress the principles we profess, which is an evident proof of the fears entertained of their progress, and affords a strong presumption, that they will be more widely extended. By the inadequate redress given to those of this way of thinking, who suffered from the outrages committed by the populace, and a backwardness to punish the offenders, or to censure those who countenanced them, a strong inclination has manifested itself to deny them the protection of the laws. By refusing to repeal statutes, which inflict upon us some of the severest punishments known to our laws short of death, and to grant us the benefit of that

toleration, which is given to every other religious sect in this country, an attempt has been made to keep up a distinction between us and other Dissenters, as professing principles peculiarly dangerous to civil government. This treatment, which marks us out from the community as obnoxious persons, may be very unpleasant to individuals, but it may prove favourable to our cause, by exciting a greater degree of attention to *our* principles, than to those of other Dissenters, and hereby rendering them better understood.

Should our countrymen proceed to greater acts of injustice than those to which I have alluded, and actually inflict upon us all the penalties of these persecuting statutes, I may venture to foretell the like consequences in a still greater degree.

That the cause of truth, in this instance, will not receive the benefit of active persecution appears by no means certain. Were the present race of believers in the humanity of Christ less enlightened in mind, and not so blameless in their conduct, I might be able to assure them, that they would go to their graves in peace. But when I consider, that so great a proportion of them are upright and virtuous, and well furnished with knowledge, I can by no means be confident of their security; for such characters are the terrour of bigots, and the objects of their implacable malice. From a licentious infidel or atheist they apprehend they have little to fear; their characters carry with them an antidote against

their sentiments. But men, who believe the same Scriptures with themselves, whose temper is candid and conduct exemplary, are formidable antagonists, whom they cannot so easily withstand. It is not very improbable, if, when foiled in the use of the weapons of reason and argument against such opponents, they have recourse to violence.

Having mentioned such circumstances as seem to me to afford good ground to hope for the speedy prevalence of the two great doctrines, by which we are distinguished from other Christians, the Unity of God, and the Humanity of Christ, I shall make a few observations upon what I apprehend to be our duty in the present situation of things. Most of these observations are naturally suggested by what has been already said; for if the progress of just sentiments in religion has been obstructed by the causes before mentioned, it is evidently the duty of every one to endeavour to remove from his system of faith every thing which is inconsistent with the principles of reason, or contradicts the language of Scripture; to make a public and undisguised profession of the truth; and to employ every method in his power to direct men's attention to the subject.

It would be too soon to conclude, that our sentiments are entirely purified from all the dregs of Popery; that there is nothing in them either redundant or deficient, and that there is no part of Scripture with which they are at variance. Such a conclusion, at a moment, when we have just been obliged

to give up so much, for which former believers in the humanity of Christ earnestly contended, might be deemed hasty and presumptuous. Those, who have taken most pains to inquire into the subject, find, notwithstanding they have no doubt of the truth of the system in general, that there are some difficulties, with which they are still embarrassed, some passages of Scripture, that have not yet been satisfactorily explained. While such obstacles remain in the way, they will necessarily retard the progress of truth, and prolong the dominion of error. Let every one, therefore, carefully apply himself to the study of the Scriptures, and endeavour to remove every difficulty which embarrasses his own mind, or is likely to prevent the reception of the truth by others.

One great cause of the aversion of men to embrace new principles in religion has always been found to be a fear, that they may have an unfavourable influence upon the practice, that they may weaken the obligations of morality, or not inforce the duties of piety and benevolence so effectually as those, which they are urged to abandon. The connection between old principles and good morals is well known, or, at least, supposed to be well known; but what connection there may be between such as are new and a right conduct is not so obvious. While, therefore, men remain in this uncertainty, they are not willing to embrace them. It is indeed our duty to receive the truth, without

regard to it's consequences, believing that these must always be salutary. But there are many, who have not arrived at so much comprehension of mind, as to be able to act upon this principle: hence it is of great service to the cause of truth, to show it's practical and useful tendency. When this is done satisfactorily, it removes prejudices and suspicions from the minds of virtuous characters, whom it is most desirable to have rightly informed, but who are more liable than others to such fears.

This I understand to be one leading design of the Society, which you have instituted, by which you propose first, by the distribution of books, to expose the errours entertained by Christians, in regard to several important articles of faith; and then to show, by moral treatises, from which they are excluded, and into which opposite principles are introduced, that the duties of virtue and piety may be enforced, with equal and even with better effect, without them. This last part of your scheme will answer the double purpose of removing the prejudices of those, who are at present averse to the truth, and of directing those, who have received it, how to apply it to the most useful purposes. But your design can be but imperfectly accomplished, at present, on account of the very small number of practical writings to be found in our language, which are not tinctured with the prevailing system of theology. It may be hoped, however, that books of this description will soon be multiplied, as the de-

mand for them increases, and the utility of them is perceived. To supply this deficiency, would be to render essential service to the cause of truth and the interests of morality.

It ought not, however, to be forgotten, that the same end may be attained (and perhaps more effectually) in another way. Let every one, who professes to believe in the strict Unity of God and Humanity of Christ, show an exemplary attention to all the duties of life, by a spirit of genuine unaffected piety, by active benevolence and strict integrity, and it will do more to silence objections against obnoxious principles, and to recommend the truth, than the best written treatise upon morals that could come from his hands.

Some persons may not have so strong expectations of the prevalence of our principles, as I have endeavoured to show there is good ground for entertaining. From them we may hear such language as this: "the times are unfavourable to the propagation of our principles: the minds of men are so much alarmed, or so strongly prejudiced, that they are not likely to listen to our arguments with patience: we are but few in number, and it is but little that we can do against so much opposition. Let us not attempt any thing, till Providence shall open a door for our labours, and the spirit of the times shall alter." But allowing the times to be as unfavourable to our designs, as is here supposed, such language cannot be proper, even in the most unpromising times. For

our obligation to make an open profession of the truth, and to endeavour to spread the knowledge of it in the world, does not depend upon the prospect we have of success. It is our duty to communicate to the world every degree of information we have acquired, whatever the effect may be, whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear; whether Providence give it a greater or less degree of success. "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand; for thou knowest not which shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they shall be both alike good." If any great change is to be wrought in the opinions of men, it must be accomplished by means adapted to the end, and therefore by the instrumentality of men. Particular events, not under human control, but under the direction of Providence, may retard or accelerate the work; but the success of it must depend, in a considerable degree, upon human exertion. Yet if no one be willing to perform the part allotted to man, we may rest assured, that it will not be accomplished. Until a trial, however, has been made, it is impossible for any one to know, in cases of this kind, whether his labours will be successful or not. It is his duty, therefore, to exert himself, in endeavouring to communicate knowledge to mankind, without inquiring what the event may be; and although he may have little or no hope, that what he may do will answer any valuable purpose.

If, however, the observations made in the first

part of this discourse be just, we are not to consider ourselves, at present, in such circumstances of despondency, but on the contrary, we are arrived at a grand period, for which Providence has been preparing the world for several centuries, when the doctrines of the Unity of God and Humanity of Christ have been freed, not only from the gross corruptions of the dark ages of Popery, but likewise from the less obvious errours, which were retained by the most enlightened of the Reformers; when these doctrines have been reconciled to the language of Scripture and the principles of reason; when a few men are so fully convinced of their truth and importance, that they have courage to profess them openly; and when mankind are alarmed at the progress which these sentiments are making. We appear to be come to the beginning of a new æra in the Christian church, the commencement of a Reformation, as remarkable and important, as the Reformation from Popery, and which will, in the course of time, eclipse the glory of that event; the first rescuing us from the errours of the church of Rome only partially; this, entirely; the one being the dawn of day, the other the meridian light.

Let every one hasten to apply his hand to so important a work, and endeavour to share in the honour which will arise from it. Let him furnish his mind with the knowledge of the truth; profess it without disguise or fear; labour to communicate it to others, by public instruction, by private conver-

sation, and by the distribution of useful books. If the harvest be great, while the labourers are few, this should be considered as a motive, not for despondency but exertion; for the fewer workmen there are in the field, the more will every one have to do, and the greater will be the honour which each will enjoy. Were they more numerous, the exertions of a single person would be overlooked.

But there are more important considerations to stimulate our endeavours, than the hope of honour. We are called upon to rescue mankind from errours, which are highly injurious to the improvement or comfort of those who embrace them, and which, if they continue to be retained by Christians, will sink their religion into universal contempt among men of knowledge and reflection. We are required, by presenting to men a rational system of Christianity, to stop the rapid progress of infidelity, which, if it became general and permanent, would be the greatest calamity that could befall mankind. If we be friends to the welfare of the human race, if we be actuated by genuine benevolence, we shall engage with zeal in so important and useful a service.

Although we are few in number, we have no reason, on that account, to despair of success. Great effects have arisen from small and inconsiderable causes. The little cloud, no bigger than the size of a man's hand, swelled, until it had covered the whole Heavens; the grain of mustard seed, which is the smallest of seeds, becomes the greatest among

herbs; and a little leaven leaveneth the whole mass. By a few apostles, aided indeed by the influence of miraculous powers, the ancient empire of idolatry was overturned, and the Christian religion established in the world. By a few reformers a great part of the Christian world was rescued from the grievous yoke of Popery; and by a few persons, equally courageous and active, may the work, which they left unfinished, be completed, and thus the remains of errour and superstition be banished from the earth.

SERMON XL.

PAUL'S VALEDICTORY PRAYER EXPLAINED AND IMPROVED.

II THESS. iii, 18.

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

I BEGIN this discourse with words, by which many discourses, and particularly those of Paul, are concluded, and by which our public assemblies are frequently dismissed. It will not be presuming too much, I fear, to suppose, that what is so often repeated may sometimes be pronounced by the speaker without thought, or heard by the audience without consideration; that they may too often be regarded as mere words of course, delivered as a signal to break up and disperse. It cannot be deemed unseasonable, therefore, if I endeavour to secure them more attention by explaining their meaning, and showing that they signify something more than a mere form, and are in fact a solemn prayer addressed to God, expressing a desire of many important blessings, which ought not to be pronounced or heard without serious reflection and deliberation; still more necessary will such an ex-

planation be, if it appear, that some affix to them a false or erroneous meaning.

The original import of the word grace is favour, and, therefore, the grace of God is the favour of the divine Being, or some blessing or benefit, which is an expression of that favour; and, as the Gospel of Christ is more valuable and important than any other benefit, it is called favour by way of eminence. Thus Paul and Barnabas persuade the proselytes of Antioch to continue in the *grace* of God, that is, in the *profession of the Gospel.* In another place Paul calls preaching the Gospel, testifying the gospel of the *grace* of God; and he beseeches the Corinthians, that they receive not the *grace* of God in vain, that is, that they receive not the *Gospel* in vain.

What in these passages is called the grace of *God* is, in other places, called the grace of *Christ.* Thus, Paul says to Timothy; "Be strong in the grace, that is in Christ Jesus;" that is, continue firm and unshaken in *the profession of the Gospel*, or in that *favour of God*, which comes to men by *Jesus Christ.* And Peter, speaking of the Jews and Gentiles, says: "But we believe that, through the *grace* of our Lord Jesus Christ, we shall be saved even as they;" that is, we shall be saved by the *Gospel* of Christ as well as they.

The *grace* of Christ, then, is not his *personal* good will or favour, but the *grace of God in Christ*, that benefit which he is the instrument of commu-

nicating to the world, or *the blessings of the Gospel*, which at different times are called *grace, the grace of God*, and *the grace of Christ.*

The apostle's wish or prayer, therefore, in the text, for the Thessalonians, signifies the same thing as if he had said; May all the blessings of the Gospel be yours! a devout wish, which it was very proper to express at the close of this and other epistles, written for the purpose of establishing their faith in the Gospel, or of correcting some errours into which they had fallen respecting it.

His words imply, that the blessings for which he prays were, in his estimation, of great value; that his friends were in danger of being deprived of them, or at least of having their value greatly impaired. If such were the meaning of the words when originally used, I believe it will be found that the prayer may be offered with equal propriety for Christians of the present day, on the same ground.

I. The apostle's wish implies, that the blessings which were the object of it were, in his estimation, of great value.

His words are the farewel address of a friend to those whom he esteemed and loved; his wish at parting, when it is usual for men to sum up, in a few words, the substance of their wishes, or the most important of the blessings which they desire. It is as if he had said: "I have now finished what I proposed to say, and am about to take my leave of you, never perhaps to address you any more. My

heart overflows with affection for you at this moment. I am anxious to express my regard in the best manner I am able; and I find, that the best wish I can form for you is, that you may continue to possess the blessings of the Gospel in their full extent and efficacy, without any doubt of their divine origin and happy tendency, without any mixture of human inventions. If this wish should be gratified, there will remain nothing for me to ask, or for you to enjoy: your happiness will be complete. Others may wish you health and temporal prosperity in these circumstances; but my desires extend to more important objects. If the grace of God in Christ be with you, you will have something of more value: praying for this blessing for you all, I conclude my letter."

The blessings of the Gospel are, in the apostle's regard, well entitled to this superiority over every other good which they had obtained; for they were the grace of God bringing salvation, that is, spiritual deliverance from the most unhappy condition. It rescued the heathen from the worship of deities, who had all the vices and passions of human nature in the worst state, whose favour was to be obtained by rites the most absurd and superstitious, the most cruel and licentious; by practices, which could not fail to debase the mind, and corrupt the character of the worshipper in the highest degree; and it introduced him to the knowledge of one God, the great creator and governor of the universe, whose nature

is perfect, and whose favour is to be obtained only by genuine piety of heart, by purity and righteousness of life. It rescued him from the uncertainty and darkness which hung over his future prospects, and gave him a clear and well founded hope of a resurrection from the dead to immortal happiness, as the reward of sincere although imperfect virtue. A better hope than this, more consoling to the mind, more powerfully animating to the faithful discharge of every personal and relative duty, a frail and mortal creature could not possible enjoy. Enlightened by such discoveries, and instructed by the excellent examples of Jesus and his apostles, the heathen enjoyed the best means of improving and perfecting his character in religious virtue, of securing permanent tranquillity of mind now, and of preparing himself for eternal felicity hereafter.

The Gospel of Christ was, therefore, in the apostle's idea, a pearl of great price, a prize of inestimable value, the best foundation of morals, the only ground of hope of a future existence. He, therefore, prays for the Thessalonians, that this blessing may be theirs. Nor is it of less value to us; nor is the same prayer less necessary at this time than at any other period. The Gospel is still the best guide and surest consolation to man. We see, from many modern examples, that those who give up their belief of it leave themselves without any certain rule of morals, abandon the hopes of a future life, and plunge into the darkness of atheism. If

the moral characters of all do not immediately suffer, it is owing to previous habits founded on a better system. So far as their new principles operate, they lead to the most fatal consequences. Whenever this benediction is pronounced, then, let Christians remember, that it is intended to remind them of the inestimable value of their faith.

II. The apostle's prayer was founded on the apprehension, that his friends were in no small danger of losing the advantage of these blessings, either by apostacy, or neglecting to improve them.

He was aware, that the temptations, to which the Thessalonians were exposed to desert Christianity, were many and powerful. The religion of the heathen, however absurd in itself, was recommended by the veneration, which is usually attached to whatever is ancient. It allowed a free indulgence to the various passions, and injoined no moral duties of painful performance; but Christianity was a new religion, without any pompous rites to strike the imagination, and with nothing to recommend it but the simplicity of truth. It strictly forbad all immoral actions and every criminal desire; it injoined duties, which, however reasonable and easy in themselves, were painful and difficult to those, who had been accustomed to practices of an opposite nature. To these internal discouragements were added many of an external nature. To continue with the Christians was to continue with the small, despised, and persecuted party. The Jews had

sometimes influence enough to excite the populace against them. This was the case at Thessalonica; and Paul was actually obliged to withdraw from that city in consequence of the opposition which they raised against him. But the heathen were of themselves sufficiently disposed to the work of persecution. It was a settled maxim with them, that the prosperity of the state depended upon the observance of the rites and ceremonies, which were employed in heathen worship. While they were maintained, the Gods, for whose honour they were intended, it was supposed would be pleased, and testify their satisfaction by granting them healthful and fruitful seasons; but whenever they were neglected, it was imagined, that the Gods manifested their displeasure by visiting the people with war, pestilence, or famine, or some other great national calamity. Christians, therefore, who forsook the ancient rites and encouraged others to do so likewise, were considered as guilty of a civil crime, and regarded as enemies to their country. Hence the violence, with which they were persecuted in all heathen states, whenever their numbers became so great as to excite alarm, and that even under some of the mildest and most enlightened princes and governors, death being inflicted upon all, who were proved to be Christians, although guilty of no crime.

Whether it were owing to the Jews, or the operation of this more general principle, it is certain, that the Thessalonians were exposed to severe trials

of their faith and stedfastness; for Paul tells them in one place, that they had received the word in much affliction; and in another he says; "For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God, which in Judæa are in Christ Jesus, for ye have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews."

When antiquity, honour, interest, passion, and the love of life, were all on the side of heathen idolatry, the temptation to forsake Christianity and return to the religion of their ancestors must be peculiarly strong. The apostle indeed highly commends their faith, and expresses great confidence in the steadiness of their future conduct; yet, considering the preceding circumstances, and knowing the weakness of human nature, he could not help feeling a considerable degree of anxiety upon this subject: that anxiety probably dictated the prayer, which we have been considering—May you persevere in your attachment to the Christian faith through every change and every trial of life, unseduced by the charms of idolatry, unmoved by the fear of reproach or of death!

Christians of the present day are by no means exempted from temptations to apostacy. They are no longer indeed exposed (God be thanked) to the violence of persecution; yet they are assailed with other motives, which are little less powerful. Not a few among men of genius and learning, inattentive to the real grounds of our faith, and the solid founda-

tion on which it is built, have deserted the standard of the Gospel, and gone over to that of the enemy. Other persons of much inferiour endowments, being ambitious of the honour of being ranked with what are termed enlightened and learned men, are tempted to follow their example. To reject vulgar opinions and commonly received truths is considered by many as a mark of spirit and discernment. Where men have any propensity, which they have been accustomed to indulge, the strict precepts of the Gospel must be a source of perpetual restraint and uneasiness of mind: it's future prospects must also awaken their fears. No wonder, then, if they receive hence a strong bias in favour of a cause, which promises them ease and tranquillity. That these motives, and especially the last of them, have induced many to renounce the Christian faith, I have no doubt: and who can be sure, that they may not tempt many more to do the same in this state of things? How natural is it for a Christian, animated with the spirit of benevolence, to feel some alarm, and to express a wish and prayer, that all his Christian friends and acquaintance may be preserved from the threatening evil?

May the desire of distinction and the fear of ridicule never make you ashamed of the Gospel of Christ! May your understandings never be imposed upon by empty declamation, instead of plain truth and solid argument! May you never be reduced by any vicious practice to the dreadful neces-

sity of wishing, that Christianity may not be true! But may you preserve your faith unshaken amidst the open assaults and secret artifices of unbelievers!

But there is another danger, which the apostle apprehended for his friends no less than apostacy, to which Christians of every age are likewise exposed, the danger of neglecting to improve the important advantages the Gospel affords for attaining moral excellence, which is elsewhere called *recovering the grace of God in vain.*

The institutions, precepts, and promises of the New Testament, are only means of the most valuable kind indeed, for attaining a certain end—the purity and perfection of the moral character. But Christians too ofsen satisfy themselves with enjoying these advantages, without considering the design, for which they were bestowed, or at least without applying them to that important purpose. To the doctrines of Christianity they yield a speculative assent, and with the forms of religion they are careful to comply, by attending public worship and receiving religious instruction; but nothing of the spirit of Christianity appears in their temper or conduct: they lay themselves under no restraint on account of their profession; they deny themselves no gratification, to which they are inclined; they are as much given to pleasure, as ambitious, and as covetous, as other men, equally neglectful of truth in their words, of fidelity in their engagements, alike unjust in their dealings, and implacable in their resentments.

Could the apostle's wish be accomplished in such characters? Does the grace of the Gospel really accompany them? By no means. He undoubtedly looked to something further. However long and steadily they may retain their profession of Christianity, it is of no use; or, if it afford them any benefits, they are confined to the present scene. But the effects of a practical faith extend beyond the grave, and produce the most important consequences in a future life: to these the apostle no doubt had reference.

As if he had said; May the grace of God in Christ accompany you at all times, and produce upon your minds it's genuine effects! May neither the cares nor the pleasures of life make you forget the great design of the Gospel, or induce you to relax your endeavours to secure it! May it purify your hearts from every improper passion, and reclaim you from every evil practice! May it inspire you with fervent gratitude to God, with unfeigned benevolence to men, and animate you to a faithful discharge of every duty! May this blessing accompany you through life, improving it's comforts and alleviating it's sorrows; and when you come to quit the present scene, may it follow you into a future state of being, crowning your virtues and your labours with an everlasting existence and immortal happiness!

These are the genuine effects of the Gospel; and there can be no doubt, that the apostle had them in his view on the present occasion. But if such fears

and such prayers were proper in a season of persecution, they are still more necessary in a time of ease and tranquillity. When men are called to give up their property, their liberty, and their lives, they are necessarily led to reflect with care upon the nature of those objects, for which they are required to make such costly sacrifices; the consequence of which must be a deep conviction of their inestimable worth. But, when men meet with no interruption in their ordinary pursuits, it is with difficulty that they direct their attention to any other object. When all things pass smoothly and pleasantly in this world, they seldom think of another. Hence the danger, to which they are exposed in these circumstances, of forgetting God and their religious principles. In such seasons nominal Christians abound. This prayer may, therefore, be regarded as a wish, that they may become something more—real and practical believers.

III. This valedictory prayer was dictated by an anxiety in the apostle's mind for the perseverance of his friends in the purity of the Christian faith.

The Gospel of Christ began to be corrupted in very early times from various causes. As in every place, where the apostles planted Christian churches, there were some converted Jews, who remained attached to the law of Moses, they exerted themselves with indefatigable zeal to prevail upon the heathen converts to submit to that law and their own traditionary explications of it. In this attempt, by fraud,

terrour, or persecution, they were but too successful. This gave the apostle Paul continual uneasiness. It was the principal occasion of his writing several of his epistles to guard the first converts against the artifices of his countrymen; and there are frequent allusions to the subject in them all.

What those doctrines or practices were, which these zealots endeavoured to introduce into the Christian church, the apostle informs us. Thus we learn, that they taught Christians to observe a distinction of meats, when the liberal spirit of Christianity allowed men to eat all food alike; to observe weekly, monthly, and annual festivals, with pharisaic rigour, when the Gospel had abolished all distinction of days; to worship angels as mediators between God and man out of an affected humility, as if it were presumption in them to address the divine Being themselves; to practise also bodily austerities in a variety of penances and mortifications. These things the apostle prohibits and condemns, as imposing an unnecessary yoke upon heathen converts, and as inconsistent with the genuine spirit of the Gospel. That Gospel exalted those, who embraced it, to a free and happy condition, which he calls Heaven; but those, who were disposed to encourage such practices, he charges with cherishing a low, carnal, and worldly mind.

Some of the converted heathen were disposed to introduce into Christianity the notions, which they

had derived from heathen philosophers. This proved a fresh source of corruption. Thus there were some, who, being ashamed of a crucified master, maintained, that Christ was not come in the flesh, that is, that he was not a man in reality, but in appearance only, and that he did not really suffer upon the cross. This the apostle John calls Antichrist. They were also probably the same persons whom Paul condemns for teaching endless genealogies, and for denying the resurrection of the dead, saying, that it was past already.

But there was another corruption of Christianity in early times, to which both Jews and Gentiles seem to have been equally disposed. A spirit of ambition and domination had already manifested itself. The Christian priesthood had already begun to assume some of that power and authority, which they afterwards carried to such height, as to advance it above the highest civil authority, or, in the language of prophecy, above all that is called God. This is the man of sin, and the mystery of iniquity, of which the apostle thought proper particularly to warn the Thessalonian Christians, to whom this epistle is addressed. In reference to all these errours and corruptions the apostle prays for his friends, that the grace of Christ may continue to be with them, that they may retain the Christian religion in it's purity, undebased by Jewish ceremonies, by human traditions, by heathen philosophy, or a domineering spirit, well knowing, that all these ad-

ditions would tarnish it's lustre. and be attended with a correspondent corruption of morals.

And those persons must be ignorant of the state of Christianity in the world at this time, or indifferent to the moral improvement and comfort of their brethren, who feel not the necessity of offering the same prayer at the present day; for men are still inclined to corrupt their Christian faith.

To say nothing of the errours of the church of Rome, which cover so great a proportion of the Christian world, there are other churches, which retain much of the usurped power, many of the distinguishing rites and external forms of that corrupt church. The spirit of Popery exists and flourishes, where the name is renounced; or, if these practices and this spirit be discarded as antichristian, men are inclined to fall into other errours of no small magnitude.

The Unity of the deity—that grand article of the Jewish and Christian revelations—is virtually denied, and that homage and reverence offered to a servant and messenger of the most High, which are only due to himself. Many are inclined to think and firmly believe, that virtue and piety are of no value in the divine estimation, and that nothing is necessary to recommend men to his favour, but relying upon the virtues and righteousness of another.

Every one, who sees the pernicious tendency of such doctrines and practices, must earnestly wish, that all, whom he loves and values, may be pre-

served from their influence, and will heartily adopt the apostolic benediction for this purpose.

I have now explained to you the several objects, to which I conceive the apostle refers in the short, but comprehensive prayer in the text. I shall now conclude with bringing them again to your recollection, and with reminding you of the objects, to which they may still be applied.

Remember, then, when you hear these words pronounced, that they are intended to remind you, that the Gospel of Christ is an inestimable blessing, more valuable than any temporal gift, than health, riches, or honour, than any religious dispensation, with which mankind have been favoured, than the covenant with Abraham or with Moses, than the instructions of the prophets;—that it is, in a word, the best gift of God to man since the foundation of the world—that as such it becomes you to prize it, to rejoice in the blessing, and to be thankful to him, who bestowed it.

Remember also, that it is intended to remind you, that this blessing, however valuable, is not secure, but that you are in danger of losing it, by abandoning your Christian faith through the artifices of unbelievers, by the love of distinction, and still more through the influence of vicious inclinations; and that it becomes you to be careful, that you do not yield to any of these motives.

Fail not to remember also, that this blessing will be infallibly lost, if you imbibe not the spirit, which

it recommends, if you observe not the precepts, which it enjoins, and do not employ that constant care and diligence, which are necessary for this purpose.

Lastly; Let it not be forgotten, that by this prayer you are reminded of the danger, to which you are exposed of having your faith corrupted by mistaken interpretations of Scripture, by rites, ceremonies, and practices of human invention.

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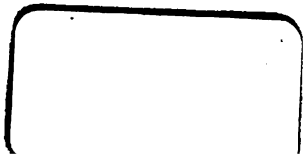
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